



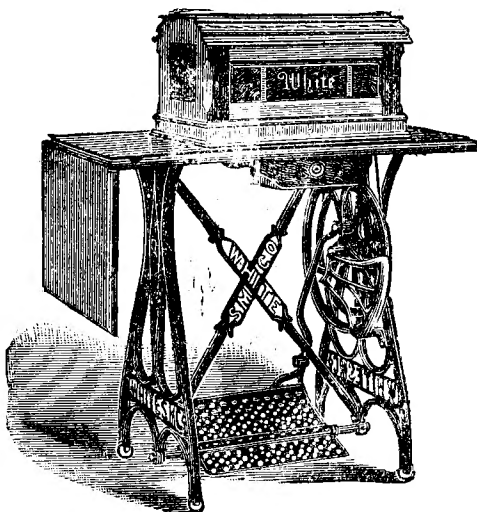
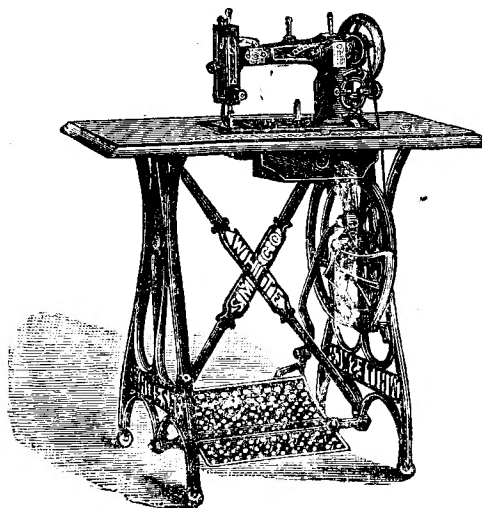
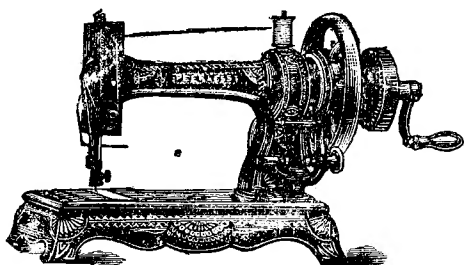
# HER GREAT IDEA

AND OTHER STORIES

BY L. B. WALFORD



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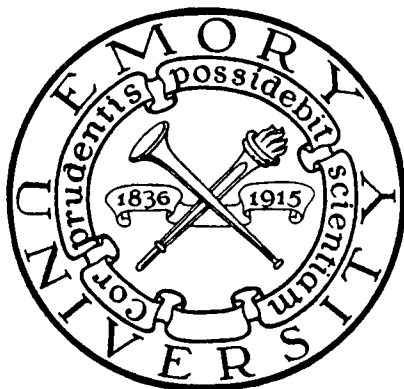
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# HER GREAT IDEA

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF "MR. SMITH," "TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS," ETC.

*THIRD EDITION*

LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON

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## HER GREAT IDEA.



A MOANING melancholy November evening was fast shrouding itself in the darkness of night, as train and omnibus, together with the more genteel hansom and brougham, severally conveyed their freights westwards, after a day's toil in that portion of our vast metropolis known as "the City."

People do not feel lively on such an evening; at least, such people as we now refer to—working, anxious, sobered-down, and more or less married men.

The brain may or may not be exhausted; but the temper and the stomach almost invariably are. Small worries and annoyances, mere trifles in themselves, have been magnified under the pressure of the heavy-laden atmosphere and dreary

sky; a shade of extra trouble, which seemed unnecessary, but which at another time would have been accounted little of, has been felt a grievance; even an additional letter to have had to write, or personage to interview, has helped to add up the sum of despondency; a grasshopper, in short, has been a burden.

At the close of some such day no one is disposed to take much neighbourly heed of another, nor to volunteer interchange of the cheerful word and hopeful prognostication current on a bright spring morning. No one wants to be asked for an opinion, nor importuned for a congratulation or note of sympathy; and certainly least of all, is one in the vein for partaking of a pleasant jest, whereabouts there hangs a flavour of being at his own expense.

Mr. Herbert, who was in just such a mood, after just such a day, had been the victim of just such an ill-timed piece of humour, when he emerged from his omnibus and walked up the dingy street of handsome, formal, hopelessly commonplace, and uninteresting houses, one of

which called him master. With a growl, which a less respectable gentleman would have turned into an oath, he had left the omnibus and the smiles of his opposite neighbours—congenial enough fellow-passengers, as a rule, with whom he journeyed to and fro six days out of the seven, but whom on the present occasion he stigmatized in his heart as grinning asses—and plunged into the dark street, with its faintly-flickering lamps, in a state of mind which nothing but a comfortable, quiet, well-cooked, and appetizing dinner, administered straight away, could have restored to equanimity.

“I do hope that woman will be punctual for once,” he muttered, as he stood upon the doorstep, fitting in his latch-key. “It is the most extraordinary thing how a creature” (he meant the cook) “who has nothing in the world but her dinner to think of all day long, cannot manage to send it up at the hour it is ordered for. I wonder if any one ever will succeed in convincing one of these pests” (Mr. Herbert had an excellent cook, of whom,

in his normal state, he entertained a high opinion) “that seven o’clock means seven o’clock,” proceeded he, shaking the key out, and opening the door, “and that if a dinner is ordered for seven, it is not meant to be rung up and hurried up at a quarter past? Humph! No signs of it yet, at any rate,” glancing through the half-open dining-room door; “and if I were to say anything, I should be told that it is all laid, and that it is only half-past six o’clock. Laid! It has been laid like that for hours, I’ll answer for it,” popping his umbrella, with a surly rattle, into the stand, and thereby knocking down a walking-stick, which straightway rolled on to the floor, and had to be picked up and restored to its place (another straw to the burden). “Most inconvenient stand that ever was made, for a narrow little bit of a passage!” cried Mr. Herbert. “Such passages as they give us in these vile London houses, too! The whole room wasted in drawing-room and dining-room,” dashing his hat on to its peg with an impetus that, as a mere matter of course,

jerked another hat off. "Confound it all!" twitching off his great coat, and in the heat of the moment tearing loose the silk tab by which it should have hung. "Confound it all! It seems as if every single thing I do or touch conspires against me to-day. There, then!" at the end of all patience; "there, then!" and he threw the coat over the rail, pockets bulging, sleeves half in and half out, the whole a huddled, shapeless mass. "Some one else may see to the trash, for I am sick of it all!" and giving the hat on the floor a vengeful kick, which would not have misbecome a schoolboy deprived of a holiday, the unfortunate gentleman—who, to let the reader into a secret, was suffering from a troublesome liver attack—slowly and heavily proceeded to mount the lengthy stair, that bugbear of the average London house.

And now comes the sad and touching part of our little story.

Mr. Herbert had a very beautiful and a very youthful-looking wife, many years his junior, who, having succeeded in

charming him out of his senses seventeen years before, had achieved the still more difficult feat of enthralling them ever since. At five-and-thirty the dark-eyed Mabel was as lovely and as winsome as in her budding womanhood, and at eight-and-forty her husband was as keenly alive to the fact as he had ever been. Upon her was concentrated the somewhat morose affection of a reserved, unapproachable nature, which loves neither easily nor often; and although his bold-eyed, handsome schoolboy son and his tall daughter, named after her mother—but designated “Mab” by way of distinction—claimed a subordinate share in his interest and anxiety, it is certain that neither one nor other, nor both together, nor twenty more children if he had had them, would have weighed, in his estimation, against the little finger of his wife.

To her, therefore, as his natural refuge and consolation when out of spirits and humour, he was involuntarily wending his weary way on the evening in question, secure, as he thought, of her sympathetic

ear for his recital of the series of vexations and crosses which had fretted his spirit throughout the day, when, on reaching the turning of the stair, and with his hand already on the rail of the banisters above, and his foot on the step of the next flight, he heard something which made him pause : a low murmur of voices, betokening the presence of occupants within the small un-lit retreat at the back of the drawing-room, which communicated with it by folding-doors, and at this hour shone only from its reflected glow.

Usually neither apartment was inhabited at the time of Mr. Herbert's daily return. His wife would be in her room dressing, his daughter elsewhere—he knew not where. Accordingly he stopped, with something of a frown on his brow. He would have preferred to go straight up, and sink into an easy-chair by Mabel's fire for a few minutes, before proceeding to his own toilette ; and now it would appear she had been detained by visitors below, and—Should he go in and see who it was ?



A slight draught of air at the same moment blew open the unfastened door of the comfortable well-lit apartment at his back, and to his surprise, as he turned, unable now to pass unperceived, he beheld it empty. Not a soul was to be seen.

“What is she doing with them in the back room?” thought he. (With him “she” always stood for his wife.) “And why are they so quiet all of a sudden? I certainly heard voices—” and then he broke off short; for as certainly he heard the voices—or rather the one voice—again.

It was a man’s voice, deep, bass, and unmistakable. Moreover, it was, or else it seemed to be, suppressed and eager: the sort of voice that penetrates by the very anxiety it betrays not to be overheard, the kind of voice that arbitrarily demands a listener.

Something seemed to start up within the husband’s bosom, and tell him this. He said to himself afterwards that he had been warned by a mysterious Providence

to halt, and that he had but obeyed its mandates when his hand relaxed its hold of the banisters and his foot withdrew from the step.

A man's voice, a murmuring voice, a voice proceeding out of the hush and gloom of an otherwise forsaken and safe hiding-place. How—how strange! Some one must be there with the voice, naturally. And that some one, whom could it be but Mabel? There—there again, deep as ever, low, and tender too, confound it! Not in the least like a voice soliloquizing—O dear, no! O no, some ear besides his own was, and must be, the recipient of its dulcet tones. If so, again, whose? Mab was at her lessons—he now remembered clearly that she did her preparation at this hour—and Tom's voice was not deep as yet, nor was he apt to murmur when under the paternal roof; added to which he was at school fast and firm for another whole month. Mabel had no brothers; neither had he. No long-lost one could have suddenly returned, to be received with demonstrations of tender-

ness from distant climes. No, there was no one he could think of. And there—hateful, horrible sound!—was the voice again.

“I am not a jealous man,” said Mr. Herbert to himself. “No one is less of a jealous man than I. Besides which, I could trust Mabel anywhere. But, upon my word, just for the sake of curiosity, I—I should like to take a peep and satisfy myself as to whom she has got in there. Of course it is no one; but—” and he stole to the hinge of the door.

Yes, he could see through—could see through only too well. The sight he saw he never forgot—he never will forget to the end of his life.

A velvet-cloaked, furred, and bonneted figure, with every curve of which he was familiar—Mabel’s figure, in short, in her pretty new winter trappings, in which but a few days before he had admired her to his heart’s content—was now outlined between him and the brilliant drawing-room beyond, and so sharply outlined that he could perceive something else—

another sight, almost the most terrible that a husband can behold. A man's arm was passed across his wife's shoulders, and another arm almost encircled her waist. The form from whence these protruded was—obviously with intent—hidden in the shadow of the curtain, whereto, it also seemed, to the stricken gaze of the beholder, to be endeavouring to draw the other. The next moment he caught the single word, "Mabel."

"O God!" exclaimed the husband; and his hand fell by his side like lead.

A few seconds before he had been in a peevish, sullen, irritable, and melancholy mood; now he told himself that he had been perfectly happy, perfectly at ease. That, strange to say, was the first thought which occurred to him.

He had never, he inwardly cried, been in jealous fashion, either vexed with, or perturbed by, his fair young wife before. As a matter of fact, he had. He had not infrequently been abroad with Mabel, when she, shining like a star, had been the cynosure of all eyes; while he, shy,

reserved, and taciturn, nothing to anybody, and of no account with anybody, had felt himself to be but a mere appendage of a brilliant woman, and had scarce known how to refrain from taking her to task for holding her own so well among the younger beauties, and keeping her little court so unflinchingly supplied by new admirers. But there had really been nothing to fret or chafe at, seeing that in happier moments he could not but own himself that it was hard to blame a woman merely for being attractive to men, and that, so far, this had been absolutely the sum-total of his wife's deficiencies. She had done nothing, said nothing, committed herself in no way at which the veriest prude could have taken umbrage. But, alas ! she was an admired and courted woman, and there was no gainsaying the damning fact.

There she now stood, neither shunning nor evading another man's embrace. Passive? She was not only passive, but absolutely tolerant of and contented under it. "Mabel." He caught the sound of her name a second time—caught it, and

ground his teeth beneath it. One of Mabel's little gloved hands rested upon the stranger's breast ; the face—it was turned from him—was uplifted towards the curtain ; and the other face behind it—that other—O Heaven !—now stooped forward, lower, lower in the shadow, and the two—met !

The sickened spectator could gaze no longer.

Blindly, dumbly stumbling down the staircase, so recently ascended in a frame so different, trembling like an aspen leaf, and staggering like a drunken man, both hands groping their way in front, as though sight and sense and all besides were failing, the wretched husband's first impulse was to hide himself from every human eye.

At the far end of the house on the ground-floor he had a little back den, familiar to the inhabitants of such mansions—a dismal little abode, wherein he seldom sat, but which was nevertheless supposed to be retained for his especial use, and of which he could without significance bolt the door ; and thither his tottering limbs now involuntarily led him. Here he

could at least be screened, secret, and unmolested; here he could wrestle out his hour of agony alone.

For it was characteristic of Mr. Herbert that it never once occurred to him to march like an avenging angel up to the spot where faithless wife and treacherous friend were playing out their guilty, cruel play even now, while he was writhing beneath their feet.

It had not fired him with savage fury, even at the first; at least, not with fury such as would have inspired instant vengeance and a raging scene. His heart had simply turned to stone within his bosom. And above all the shame, horror, and amazement of the moment had arisen the wild instinct for flight and solitude.

He had not even given himself time to learn who was his supplanter. It mattered little. He would easily find out. All that now mattered was—what was it?

He could not think: he could not reason.

Mabel, for seventeen blessed, peaceful years his pure, good, tried and true, and

loving and beloved wife—Mabel, could it be Mabel of whom he was now thinking, whom in his heart he was now cursing? Could it have been Mabel's hand—that hand which had so often nestled within his own—that hand which had leaned upon him in every rough and difficult path of life—that hand which had ever soothed his brow in trouble, and smoothed his pillow in sickness—that hand—that dear hand—A groan burst from the husband's lips, and a burning, scalding tear welled from beneath his quivering eyelid.

Mabel, O Mabel! Always too good for him, always too fair, too beauteous; but O, that it should have come to this!

There had been no warning, no preparation, not the slightest ominous foreboding. But for that momentary pause upon the landing, but for the echo of a low-toned, unfamiliar voice, he might never have suspected any lurking danger at all; he might have gone on and on in his infatuation to the end, perchance, of life, an inhabitant—like so many more—of a fool's paradise.

The clock ticked on: he heeded not its



tale. Time passed : he knew not that it went. No one came to disturb him ; indeed, none knew that he was there, nor guessed his hiding-place for long. And still the crushed and bowed figure sat stiff and motionless as a form of marble ; giving no token of life, save now and again when there flickered a tremulous, feeble stirring of the fingers which upheld the head, and covered the workings of the face beneath.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ And really, Tom, mamma is as bad as papa, and I don’t know what we are all coming to. I have just been *dying* to tell you. I have not known what to do with myself. The whole house is odious. Papa is perfectly unbearable ; mamma is forever in tears ; the servants look significant and all that is disagreeable ; and the worst of it is that no single one will give poor me the slightest hint as to what is at the bottom of it all. I suppose—for it is the only thing I can think of—that papa has been losing money on the Stock Exchange. If he has, of course it is very unfortunate ; but still, he might at least

tell the truth about it, and not look at us all as if it were *our* fault—particularly at mamma, as if it were hers—when the blame, if there be any, can be only his own. I would take mamma's part, if she would show some spirit and resent it. But she does nothing of the kind: she only looks meek, and dissolves after a time. Now you know, Tom, that it *is* provoking to be dissolved at. So, then, I am ready to take papa's part again; only if I attempt it he growls at *me* next. He has often growled at me before, but I never knew him bad—really bad to mamma. Why, nothing was ever too good for her, and she could get round him when no one else dared to say a word. But now, when he has got to be bearded, even I am less nervous about it than she is."

"O, rot!" said Tom, concisely. "What a jaw about nothing! You think to oust mamma? Just you try it on, miss!"

"I don't want to 'oust' mamma, as you call it," rejoined his sister indignantly. "If you only knew, I am most anxious for mamma to be in favour, most particularly

anxious, but I can't tell you boys everything," with a great air, the air of sixteen years up in arms; "this turn of affairs has upset all my calculations."

"All her calculations! O Lor'! All her calculations!"

"You boys are always rude. But do listen," responded Mab, to whom a confidant was too precious to be thrown away by a quarrel—"do listen, and then judge for yourself, since you are so wise and scornful. First of all, we are to have no Christmas party this year."

Tom's face fell at once. "That's serious," he said, in an altered tone. "That's business-like. Now I know where I am. No Christmas party! I don't care a hang for your black looks and your tears—women are always imagining black looks and tears—but no Christmas party! O, that's bad. Are you sure of that? Why, I had already invited several of our men! O, we can't have a stopper put upon that; we can't have any nonsense of that kind."

"Well, I told you—"

"Ay, but you didn't tell me that. No,

no; I'll stand by you there, Mab. Why, we never went without a Christmas party in our lives; and I am not going to begin now—not if I know it."

"Just what I have said, and I have said all I could besides. I have worked upon mamma, and attacked papa; I have attacked him after breakfast and after dinner—you know after dinner is his best time—but it has been all of no use. And—and—if it's hard upon you, it is doubly hard upon me, if you did but know," whimpered poor Mab, almost in tears herself, though she objected to her mother's "dissolving." "I have my own reasons, my own particular, *private* reasons," with a stimulating sniff that might have moved any one but a brother.

"O, blow your particular, private reasons!" said Tom, however. "You always were a mysterious cat, and I hate mysteriousness. What else is there?"

"Two invitations have been refused."

"Good ones?"

"Not particularly. I did not care much about them, but then it means that others

will be refused also, and we *shall* care about some of them."

"It's a beastly fraud," murmured Tom, growing more and more grave—"that's what it is. Well?"

"Well, then, I don't believe—in fact, I am sure that papa has not bought mamma any Christmas present. He always used to show me his Christmas present, first; and this time I am sure, positive, not only that he has not bought one, but that he does not mean to buy one. If mamma does not get any, that means that we don't either, Tom."

"Pooh! I should prefer a cheque," said Tom magnificently.

"A cheque! But what made you think of a cheque? Mamma is not expecting any cheque, I am certain; and if there is none for *her*—"

"You are a perfect croaking raven," burst forth Tom, all at once losing heart and temper. "You take a delight in saying beastly things just to plague a fellow. I don't believe a word you say. I don't believe about the party, or the invitations, or the presents or anything. I don't care

a hang about the whole beastly bag of tricks. I shall just go to mamma, and hear what she has to say. *She* will tell me the truth, and not such a pack of nonsensical lies. I'll square her: and then if she can't square papa, I'd like to know it. You girls, you never know anything; you make up bogies, and frighten yourselves into fits over them. Wait, and you'll see what I can do;" and away ran the mighty man of valour to his mamma's apron-strings; for of all the slaves of that sweet face and gentle spirit, Master Tom was only second to one.

But when he emerged from her presence his face was longer than when he had entered it.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was one object in life which by this time occupied and engrossed the unhappy Mr. Herbert's mind to the exclusion of almost every other.

Strange to say, he had never succeeded in identifying the individual who had wrought such havoc in his domestic happiness; he had come home at odd hours, slipped in with noiseless footsteps, made

many inquiries, and maintained an eager watch ; but, so far, all had been in vain.

It only showed him, he told himself bitterly, the sort of woman with whom he had to deal. Mabel, whom once he had believed to be the very soul of purity and honour, with a mind and conscience limpid as crystal, must be as artful and dangerous as the foul fiend himself. The more earnestly he strove to detect her, the more cleverly she eluded his vigilance. He made no way ; and the more he hung and brooded over the terrible business, the less able he felt to attack it in open fight face to face ; while the keen suspicion that the while he thus felt himself powerless and outwitted, the affair might be progressing, and probably was progressing, to the entire satisfaction of the guilty pair, paralyzed every effort except that which took the one direction.

“ I will yet know him ; I will yet find him out—and then—”

This was his one thought, and it took the place of every other. Even to the eye of the most casual observer Mr. Herbert was an altered man.

No charm could now wile away the settled cloud which overhung his brow, no tender solicitude evoke a response, nor carefully prepared attention awaken even a pretence of gratitude. Nay, these even seemed to gall and irritate, while the proverbial soft answer, which had once never failed to subdue and win, would be met by a shudder or a snarl, incomprehensible to behold, frightful to look back upon.

“*She* knows,” he would mutter deep in his miserable heart; “*she* knows—she, with her innocent face and blue eyes. O, how dare she front me as she does, before her children, her servants, and the rest of the world? But wait, Mabel, wait!”

Once he had learned her secret, and had tracked her through all the labyrinth of hypocrisy and falsehood so excellently spun around her downward path, once he had done this, she should have—her lesson.

“I fear, I fear I know not what,” thought Mabel on her part. “The brain—the poor overwrought, overtaxed brain—how often have I heard of its giving way under pressure! And who can tell what pressure



there may not have been, ere it could thus affect a man like my dear husband? If he would but let me help him! If he would but tell me his secret anxiety or sorrow, or whatever it may be! Even if I were of no use to him, if I could not advise or support, I could at least comfort him, tell him to hope, whisper how I love him, and would always love him; and that, if he dreads reverse of fortune or privations on my account, he need not, not for a single moment. So I still kept his love and confidence, I could cheerfully, willingly submit to anything; and our dear girl and boy—O, they would soon feel as I do. But no; not a word—not a kind look,—and he only turns on me, if I dare venture on an inquiry, or a caress; if—” and here the grief that could find no relief in words would vent itself in sobs and weeping.

It was after a month so passed by all, that Tom had come home, and been instructed by his sister in her view of the state of the case.

“Well, what do you think?” she

demanded eagerly, as he sallied forth from their mother's room thereafter. "What do you think? Was I not right? Did I exaggerate? Was I as much 'out' as you supposed?"

A perverse spirit suddenly seized Tom. He might have been, in his own language, "floored" himself, but he had certainly no intentions of owning as much to the triumphant Mab.

"O you green goose!" he cried, rising to the occasion, "O you silly! Out? I should say you were! Rather! Girls are such nincompoops. I asked mamma at once, and she says it is only that he has been worried and out of sorts, and all that sort of rot. When I asked if he had not been grumpy to her, she laughed at the very idea. O, you are green, Miss Mab! As for our party, why, of *course* we'll have it," proceeded the young gentleman, striking wildly ahead of the truth; "and if you want to know how I know, miss, I have my own very 'particular *private* reasons' for knowing. So there's tit for tat, miss," concluded he, with a provoking

mimicry of her own manner, which would have raised an inevitable retort in a less equable disposition.

But Mab had an easy temper and a supreme opinion of herself. She could afford to despise Tom—boys were always boors; while she—she was a young lady as tall as her mother, and people said growing more like her every day.

If her brother now proved to be in the right, so far from being disconcerted, she felt she could forgive him everything, or rather, that she would forget that there was anything to forgive. If it were, as Tom said, that her father had been fretted and dejected by things going wrong in “the City,” added to a little personal ill-health, and that mamma had only been over-sympathetic and over-anxious about him, why, all might yet come right; and she was only too willing to believe that she had herself put a mis-construction upon certain looks and tones which could not be altogether explained away.

Her spirits rose with a rebound. She felt all at once in the mood for anything, even

for carrying into effect a little dramatic performance which had been schemed and almost played some weeks before, but had subsequently been abandoned under the stress of adverse circumstances.

That night she considered would be just the night for it. Fred was coming, and would help her. She was sure he would think it a favourable opportunity; and if he did, what fun it would be!

Fred was a cousin, a grown-up and much regarded youth of twenty, who was a general favourite, and with no one more than Miss Mab. Without his sanction she could do nothing—with it she could be as bold as any lion. It was, we may just mention, in reference to him that she had more than once hinted at her “particular *private* reasons” in the interview with Tom.

She now tripped downstairs with a joyful bosom at the sound of the dinner-gong.

Alack! there was nothing very joyful in response. Fred was not to look in until later on, and at the board sat the

same silent figures, and facing each other were the same sad and rigid faces, which she had every evening of late beheld there. There was the old ominous, brooding oppression throughout.

Even Tom did not chatter and gabble as he was wont to do : even he seemed to feel the prevailing influence. She looked at him. Could he have been deceiving her, or contrariwise been himself deceived?

But just as the above ugly suspicion crept chilly through the poor girl's veins, she caught a ray of hope and sunlight on the other hand.

Something, she knew not what, and to us it matters not what—something at the moment, and for the moment, touched and struck Mr. Herbert, bringing over his stern set features a single relenting gleam of tenderness as he lifted his overhanging brows, and stole one long, furtive look at his wife.

The gleam was evanescent—it was succeeded by a heavy sigh and compression of the lips ; but it had been seen, marked, and noted down for his daughter's use, and

it did much towards restoring her to confidence and courage.

“At least I have been wrong about mamma,” she thought.

As soon as the meal was over, she disappeared, and was absent for a considerable length of time. Tom, restless and unoccupied, and, in spite of himself, missing his usual stimulus in her society, presently strolled off in search of her, and not being successful, found his way to his own room, where his possessions, his cabinets, collections, and what-not, catching his eye, he was presently too much occupied in handling and turning them over, (it being his first evening at home, when, in consequence, they were something of novelties) to return down-stairs.

Husband and wife were thus left alone.

“I wonder, I do wonder, whether it would not be as well to say something now?” pondered Mr. Herbert, recognizing all at once in himself a resolution unfelt before. “Here is the boy come home; and, if only for his sake, I ought to take some measures in the matter, I

suppose. If we keep on as we are doing much longer, I shall go mad, and she, perhaps, do worse. Here is a chance. Had I not better grasp it? Let her see at once how much I know, and, perhaps, who can tell? She may be induced to confess the rest—it may not be so bad as I think. How young, how simple she looks sitting there! O, if I could but think, could *but* believe—”

A scuffle and tittering from behind the door.

“O, those children back again!” groaned poor Mr. Herbert, ready to fancy now that he had been for long waiting and thirsting for the opportunity thus rudely snatched from his grasp. “Oh—h!” and he threw himself back in his chair with a heavy and repelling aspect.

But the next moment saw him bolt out of it as if he had been shot!

Heavens! Who—what was this?

Who was entering the room, gliding from behind the folding-doors, sidling up to him, mincing towards him, curtsying low in front of him?

His wife? Her double? Her wraith?  
Her living duplicate?

Or—stop: were his eyes beginning to perceive, and had they been blind and blocked before?

The face was not Mabel's—no—thank God, it was not Mabel's; it was only that of Mabel's daughter.

“Good God!” almost shouted the merchant, his orbs starting from their sockets. “Good God! What devilry is this? You girl!”—and truth compels us to state that he seized the amazed masquerader by both shoulders, and shook her till her teeth chattered, and the bonnet—her mother's bonnet—toppled from her head, while the hair, which had been hurriedly fastened up in Mabel's fashion, fell down and flowed freely over the shoulders as only Mab's could; “you—girl, you wicked, wicked girl!” cried Robert Herbert, heedless of all beyond the emotions of his own bursting bosom. “You—*you* to bring about all this mischief, all this misery! You to deceive—half to kill me—to let me remain all these weeks in torture!”



“Dear,” said a voice of the softest, gentlest remonstrance close beside him, “poor Mab does not understand. Her little jest has excited you : but do not be angry with her—she meant no harm.”

“Meant no harm!” thundered her husband.

“Indeed, no. She has often put on my things and dressed herself to look like me before; it is a favourite little amusement of hers, especially since she has taken in several of our friends, who thought it *was* me for some minutes; and she thought it might divert you to see her, just for once. But go now, dear child,”—aside—“go now, and take them off. You see papa does not care to be disturbed; he is not well, not very well to-night. Go at once,” added Mabel, more peremptorily, as she was not obeyed on the instant. “Can you not see? He is ill. He—”

“I am *not* ill.” The voice was that of a person awakening from a dream, uncertain, harsh, and strange. “I am not ill,” asserted Mr. Herbert, passing his hand across his brow. “Let the child stay—

stay and explain. Girl," he continued sternly, "tell the truth, and the whole truth now, if ever you did in your life. Little you know what you have done! But out with it now. For what purpose, to what end did you assume this disguise one night—stop—mark me, Mab, *when did you last appear in it?*"

"Let me think, papa: do not look at me like that. You frighten me out of my wits, and I am sure I cannot imagine why."

"Tush! Answer my question. And, hark ye, no evasions, no trifling. I must and will know."

"Let me think, papa—"

"I am letting you think. Quick. No need for long thinking when it is only the truth you have got to tell."

"I am trying to remember, indeed I am; but indeed, papa, I have often done it. Where was the harm? Every one thought it so amusing. And I am just mamma's height, and I have taken in heaps of people."

"When last—girl? When last?"

"I think about a month ago, papa.

It was for you I did it that evening, too ; only you were so late in coming home that I—that we—Fred was here, and he said better not to bother you, as you would be sure to be tired, as you were so late ; and—”

“Fred!” murmured her father, more and more light stealing in upon him.

“Do, Fred, come in, and tell him all!” cried Miss Mab, running to the door, and producing a tall figure on the spot. “Fred was waiting here to see the effect, papa. Fred, tell him why we did it—you know, Fred. Papa, it was because—because we both knew how fond you are of mamma, and how you would never say ‘No’ to anything she asked ; and I have something to ask that I—that we—are very, very anxious you should not say ‘No’ to. So we thought if I made myself like mamma—and Fred says I am her very image in this bonnet and pelisse—”

“Her very image!” scornfully echoed Mr. Herbert. But there was a relenting in his voice, nevertheless.

“Fred says so,” said Mab, somewhat

taken aback. "I only repeat what he says. And he was here that night."

"*Fred! Was it you?*" There was a sort of gasp, but not another word could his uncle speak. (O, what a fool, what an utter fool he had been!)

"Was it I, sir, who put the notion into Mabel's head? No, I don't think so," replied the young man briskly. "But the fact is that when she told me of it as her great idea, I thought it a deuced good one, and backed her up in it. If we had only not had such a glare of light in here," looking round, "I'll be bound you would have been taken in just now as completely as the most of us were. I was so myself, the first time I saw her. Even as it is, I do call her uncommonly good. Don't you think so yourself, Aunt Mabel?" wheeling round. "But I am sure," subjoined the speaker, recognizing with some consternation that in the face of neither uncle nor aunt did he read the exact response required, "I am sure if we had known there would be the slightest objection, we should never have done it, should we, Mabel? It was only

to pave the way, eh, Mabel? Well, Mabel—hum—haw—as we have got so far, had we not better—eh?”

“And ‘Mabel,’ too,” murmured Mr. Herbert, under his breath. “I notice Fred always calls her ‘Mabel’—never ‘Mab.’ O, that I—” Then aloud: “But was it you, young man, who, a month ago—was it you whom I saw standing over there, in that doorway, out of the light, hiding yourself behind the curtain?”

“Ha! ha! ha! Well, uncle, I suppose it was. She would have me to hide; though goodness knows why, as I was to appear on the scene in half a minute.”

“My boy,” exclaimed Mr. Herbert solemnly, “you have caused me a grief, a misery—” He broke off short; more he durst not confess.

“I am sure I am sincerely sorry, sir. I can only plead that it was unintentional. I suppose you thought it was some outsider. (There, Mabel, you see; I told you I did not like the hiding!”—in parenthesis.) “It was the only part of the idea I objected to. I knew you would not have

minded me, sir—at least, not half so much,” added the youngster, who was a favourite, and aware of it. “So now—O, hang it all, uncle! do have compassion on us, and say what you did see, and—and—eh, Mabel?—how much, or how little, you are disposed to pardon?”

“Pardon?” cried his uncle inconsistently. “Pardon? I’ll pardon everything, you young dog, and you know it. *You!* Was it only *you?*” unflatteringly. “But what was I to think? I saw a pair of arms round her; I saw a face—or rather, I did not see the face—but I saw that there was one kissing her—”

“Aha, I guessed it! And you thought it was some stranger fellow Mabel had picked up without your knowledge? No wonder you were in a rage. That would have been a nice state of things, I allow.”

“And so *that* was at the bottom of all the fuss?” cried Mab, at the same moment, in her much relieved heart. “What a blessing Tom is out of the way; I should never have heard the last of it, if he had known.”

“Well, but now, uncle, now that you

know it was only me," proceeded the iniquitous Fred, with an insinuating smile, "you don't mind me in the least, do you? And—and I know I am not good enough for Mabel—" taking her hand with the usual unmistakable air.

"O, that's it, is it?"

"Don't you think, sir, you—it was really rather shabby of you?" hinted the audacious lover, his boldness every moment increasing. But the event justified it.

"Shabby? It was shabby to a degree!" all at once cried Mr. Herbert, a wild ring of inexplicable exultation in his voice. "I own it; I am ready to make amends for it. What am I to do for you? Quick, for I have other things to think of. You fancy yourself in love with this sixteen-year-old chit of a school-girl, of course? And you want my consent to your philandering with her, of course? And you will call it being 'engaged,' I suppose? O, you may 'engage' on those terms if you like, you simpletons—call it 'engaging.' I'll have no letters nor nonsense, remember. Your mother will take care

that you behave properly, miss ; and you, master, see that you don't abuse my confidence in you. You may come and go, and flirt with her—between lesson-hours—and think you are going to marry each other, which ten to one you won't, but I have no objection if you do, in half a dozen years' time ; but one thing," and his tone changed, and they looked to see what the sudden change meant, and beheld it in his face as well as heard it in his voice ; " but one thing," he proceeded so solemnly, in such strange awe-stricken accents that none durst question nor demur, " one thing, Mabel, child, mark what I tell you—never, never again—never, to the end of your life, attempt to play off this farce again ; never trick yourself out in your mother's clothes, and seek to pass for her a second time."

So speaking, and ere they could recover from their astonishment, he had pushed the young lovers gently through the folding doors and closed them, and turned and taken his wife to his heart.

In a few minutes she had learned all.



## PAUL'S BLUNDERS.



It was a raw, cold December evening, and a London fog—a true December London fog—was slowly spreading its thick yellow folds over street and alley, circus and square.

Within the small and shabby bedchamber of his lodgings, Paul Barnaby was putting the finishing touches to his evening toilet, preparatory to going out to dinner; shivering now and again as some of the outer atmosphere penetrated even into the little flaring gas-lit apartment, and taking no more time over the operation than was absolutely necessary.

“I dine out so seldom,” said he to himself, when all was complete and he had surveyed somewhat wistfully a dress-coat whose fashion dated from some years back —“I dine out so seldom, and it is such a

beastly bad night, that, upon my word, if I take a hansom for once, I don't think any one can blame me. Portland Place is pretty nearly a mile from here, and though, of course, a mile is nothing to walk, still, just for once"—and then he stood still and reflected.

As a matter of fact, it was not a question of any one's blaming him. He was alone in the world, sadly alone. He was responsible to nobody for an extravagance, and nobody but himself benefited by an economy. But, nevertheless, he paused, and there was something almost pathetic in that pause.

Poor Paul was poor, very poor; and he had not always been so.

To be sure, the young man lived in respectable lodgings in a respectable quarter of the metropolis. Furthermore, he worked in a respectable business-house in the City, and received quarterly what many would have reckoned respectable wages for so doing. Ah! but the sting and the pinch of poverty may be felt in a thousand deprivations and humiliations which would

not excite the pity of the philanthropist, and with which, even you, gentle reader, will perhaps hardly sympathize, unless you, too, like this Paul of mine, have known better days. Paul had begun life, you see, brilliantly.

First, there had been the luxurious, pampered, schoolboy episode at Eton; then its natural sequel, with the same sort of accompaniments and surroundings at Oxford; then, a pause on the threshold of manhood, with all the world at the youngster's feet, and only a variety of smooth and tempting paths to choose from; and then—a sudden fall of the curtain.

His father, a prosperous banker, had failed, and in a moment all had been changed for his only son, the supposed heir of his supposed wealth.

It had now become no longer a mere question of choice between the Life Guards and the Coldstreams, or, again, between a seat in Parliament and foreign travel. A few brief months had seen the broken-hearted parent laid in his grave, and the

son, now entirely thrown upon his own resources, bravely struggling to adapt himself to the novel and bitter circumstances of his altered lot. A place had been found for him in the business-house of an old and steadfast friend; such a place as many a less favoured youth would have been thankful for, but which—oh, well, Paul took it, and told himself he was glad to get it, albeit the salary which he was now to receive was barely as much as had hitherto been frittered away by the dandy Oxonian on studs, gloves, and *eau-de-Cologne*.

This must now suffice for every sort of demand. No one helped him. He had but few relatives, and such as there were had been themselves involved in his father's ruin. It was natural that they should look coldly on the son, and, indeed, consider that Paul had got off almost with flying colours, in that he had not to beg his bread, or flee the country. As it was, the bankrupt's son was lucky, remarkably lucky. What better could he expect? What remained for him but to take

perforce the lowest room, and only feel grateful that there was any room at all? As to his looking to *them* for any sort of assistance, the bare idea was preposterous.

Then Paul had begun by making mistakes, as most of us would have done in his place. In the first blush of ignorance and inexperience, he had considered many things as necessities, which time, by painful degrees, taught him to call by another name. He had fitted himself out as he thought, humbly enough. He had given up this thing and that, put aside one and another tempting invitation, given up here and there a luxurious habit and elegant convenience; but he had not gone far enough, and bills long and urgent poured in presently to appall his startled vision. There was no one now to fall back upon; no easily-won-over parent to make straight every little crookedness. In silence and in suffering, very real suffering, and very patient, proud silence, the burden had been borne, and the lesson learned, and Paul Barnaby became thereafter—perhaps

thereby—a man, and no longer a youth.

Years had now passed, and the old Eton and Oxford days had grown dim in the retrospect. Most of the light-hearted comrades he had known there, had drifted away into smoother and sunnier waters than any into which he could follow; but some still held fast by Paul, caring infinitely more for him in his loneliness and friendlessness than in the days of his palmy, coxcombry youth; and it was to the house of one of these that he was going on the December evening when we find him wondering within himself whether he might not just for once repair thither in the almost forgotten comfort of earlier times.

He did not say to himself, as he would have said some half-dozen years before, that it did not look well to tramp in all muffled-up and mud-stained among the spruce men-servants assembled to usher in the guests at a smart dinner-party; he did not take into consideration that he might bring into the house with him traces of the

frosty fog on his long fair moustache, and disarranged curly locks—though Paul was a handsome fellow, and had once thought a good deal about being so; but he did mind the actual physical discomfort of trudging over slushy pavements, and through a chilling, blinding, suffocating winter mist, against which his somewhat infirm outer coat would be but a poor protection.

He dined out, as he said, so seldom. And to own the truth, he had been looking forward throughout the whole day in a way that almost made him ashamed, to this dinner at Jack Phillimore's.

Jack had lately married, and his nice little wife, instead of cold-shouldering his friend, had been quite smitten with Paul's melancholy face, and had on the present occasion sent him just such a cordial, cheery little note of invitation as is pleasant for any one to receive, and is especially soothing to a poor bachelor who is still in some doubt as to his welcome under a new régime.

Of course it had been accepted; and

throughout the tiresome, troublesome day for which the engagement had been made, it had been, as we have said, remembered with something like a glow of anticipation, by one who seldom had anything to anticipate.

He should sit down to a good dinner, amid good company, in a good, comfortable, well-warmed, and well-lit dining-room; instead of partaking of a semi-cold chop or steak in the solitude of a dingy, dusty little apartment at home—his sole alternative as a rule, when too tired or too much dispirited to go to his club.

His club he could not even yet give up; it was almost his only link with brighter and happier times. There he could still feel himself a gentleman among gentlemen. There he could forget his shabby wardrobe and anxious thoughts respecting it. And there, for a time, he could lose sight of the future with its gradually decreasing prospect of anything better than the present.

He was rather a favourite, moreover,



among his fellows. They said he was a sad sort of man. His story was known, and invested him with something of the sanctity of misfortune. His quiet face, often spent and weary, upon which long hours of hard work and close confinement, coupled with neglect and discomfort at home, soon came to imprint their own tale, won for him a certain tenderness at the hands of all, and his happiest hours were thus passed among them.

But he seldom went into so-called "society." The only people he knew who belonged to it, were pleasure-seekers pure and simple, and at first he had merely shrunk back from them because his life had become so different from theirs that it made him wince to hear the gay appointments made and the parties formed, in which he could have no share; but by-and-by he had held aloof from another motive. He had come to perceive that time, health, energy and leisure should have other ends in view than chasing idle hours away with costly arts and devices; he had learned to *think*, and he had learned

to *feel*,—and thus it had come to pass that by-and-by he had ceased to be invited by those who cared to do neither.

How would it be if he were now about to make some friends of another sort? The idea was exciting, and rested upon tangible grounds. Major Phillimore was an excellent man, and was not likely to have married a foolish, frivolous woman, and indeed Paul seemed already to have a vision of a pleasant hearth and a bright welcome, and merry talk, and perhaps—who could tell?—an introduction now and again, leading to other genial, sociable evenings, which the poor fellow could not but occasionally long for, but which, so far, had never come in his way. Jack Phillimore's dinner-party was a great deal more to him than appeared.

“I do wish I could afford a new coat, however,” said he, looking over his shoulder, and twisting round his sleeve to catch a glimpse of the elbow. “Phillimore is the last man to mind about such things for himself, but there will be a lot of people there to-night, and, upon my

word, this is almost too bad to appear in. Not that it *is* bad ; that is to say, it is not worn out, but the cut is so very, terribly ancient ; and the collar—no one wears such collars now. It is of no consequence what I wear at the club, or rather, they would wonder what was going to happen next if I turned out in a new one,” with a faint, bitter smile ; “ but it is different at a dinner-party where no one knows me, and where there will be ladies too. One ought to be just decent to go to a friend’s house. Pshaw ! I should have thought of that before, if I meant to think of it at all. If I am going to turn fine gentleman again—what’s that ? ”—as the clock within the adjoining little parlour struck the half-hour. “ Half-past seven,” said Paul, more briskly, “ and that clock is several minutes slow. I must be off, if I mean to walk, and reach Portland Place by eight. Perhaps I had better walk. I should have to call my own hansom, at any rate, for I could not send that poor girl out for one on such a night : and once started, it will be no great matter to go on. After all. I

have often been out in a worse fog than this."

He was mistaken; he had never in his life been out in a worse fog than that. Within-doors he had scarcely realized its increasing volume and density; and, indeed, for some minutes after emerging from the narrow side-street in which he dwelt, into the fuller and busier thoroughfare close by, it only appeared to him that the place was unusually silent for that hour, and that its lights were singularly dim and few.

By and by even these seemed to dwindle, and the roll of passing vehicles sounded strangely faint and distant in his ears. It grew darker and darker. Phantoms glided past, and were almost instantly lost to view. Footfalls became muffled, movements wavering and uncertain. He began himself to falter.

"If I had not known every inch of the way," he murmured, "I should have stood but a poor chance of reaching Phillimore's house by eight o'clock. As it is, I shall be late. Never mind, every one will be

late. Nobody will be exact to the time on a night like this. Let me see, is this the circus?" he cogitated, after a time. "Yes, this is the circus. So much, at least, I can make out. Now, steady, and bear down to the left, ay, to the left, till I am past the church; then cross over—but first the church? Where is it? I can barely see the next lamp-post now. By Jove, what a night! Lucky I did not waste my money on a hansom; the driver would have demanded double fare, and, as likely as not, have run me on to the pavement and left me there. Besides, come to think of it, I have not seen a single hansom out. I have hardly seen a carriage. This fog must be worse than I thought. On in front it is blacker than ever; it is as black as midnight"—coming to a standstill. "By Jove! what am I to do? Can I go on? Or must I turn back? And if I do turn back, shall I ever find my way home? It *is* hard luck, so seldom do I dine out," he added, with the same sad, little touch of wistful self-pity which had accompanied the words before—"yes, it is

hard luck that there should have been this fog to-night."

Almost ere the plaintive expression had escaped, however, the luck seemed to change.

He was in Portland Place, and he knew it. A few more steps would suffice. The blackest, thickest mist in the world could not keep him back now from Jack Phillimore's dinner-party; and with the cheering reflection, all his former good spirits returned, and he stepped briskly out, already disposed to make a jest of the bygone perils of the way.

"I only hope no one has been really kept away," quoth he to himself; "the walkers are the best off after all, on such a night; carriages are sure to get into a muddle; and there certainly seem to be none about;" turning round, and pausing to strain both eyes and ears. "No, I neither see nor hear one. The poor Phillimores! And this their first dinner-party! Well, *I* have not failed them, at all events. I daresay they will think it is because I am in no great request"—a pause—"and if they do, they only think

the truth. I can do nothing for anybody, so it is not likely that anybody would take much trouble about me"—(which was hardly the exact state of the case, but was Paul's view of it, a view for which he was, perhaps, not to blame under the circumstances).

"An engagement with me means an engagement," pursued the young man, turning to resume his journey; "so here I am, despite every obstacle; 'rain, or hail, or fire, or snow,' let alone a London fog, has not hindered me. This is the house, I believe?" somewhat doubtfully stopping in front of a mansion, over whose threshold a lamp faintly shed its rays. "There is no number, but I am certain it is the door, and"—with the word the door opened.

All right. A smart, liveried footman held it back expectantly, and at the bottom of the staircase the usual solemn butler stood in readiness to precede each fresh arrival. No more men were about, and it was tolerably obvious that no more guests had so far made their appearance.

Paul was the first after all, and hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry that he was so.

He was evidently beheld with relief by the functionaries below-stairs, and flattered himself he should be as welcome above.

"I could hardly find my way," he observed, cheerfully, divesting himself of coat and muffler; "the fog is very thick outside."

"Yes, sir; very bad night indeed, sir."

"Came on suddenly, too."

"Yes, sir; very suddenly, sir."

("Nice, respectable looking man," thought Paul, "and never asks my name. He must remember me, though I have only been here once, and that on a dark afternoon. But these good London servants are wonderfully clever about remembering faces.")

Nevertheless he felt the compliment. It pleased him, as it pleases every one to be individualized, and he stepped upstairs behind the deferential functionary, and next into the drawing-room, holding up



his head a little more than was his wont.

All thrown away. The drawing-room was empty, and on a sudden he felt a chill.

Nobody down, and nobody—could it be that nobody was expected? Certainly not, for as certainly had he been hailed below as an invited guest, and equally certainly had he in his pocket his note of invitation for that day and hour—an old-fashioned precaution which he had somehow come to adopt, and which, with an involuntary pang of alarm, he told himself might be of use on the present occasion.

For try as he might, Paul could not altogether rid himself of the idea that the room in which he was now left waiting, hardly bore the stamp of one prepared and made ready for an evening of festivity. There was a large, blazing fire to be sure, and several handsome shaded lamps shed their glow on various portions of the apartment; everything was undoubtedly comfortable and orderly, and as it should

be in a well-appointed drawing-room ; but something, even to an unpractised eye, was still lacking. There were no flowers, no plants, no setting forth of small elegancies and knickknacks, no general arrangement and marshalling of all that was best to the front, as is customary on gala days—it was, in short, as though the whole were on view in excellent, homely, work-a-day garb, in place of holiday attire.

Unable to define this, Paul nevertheless experienced a dim uneasiness as its result. He had lived so much alone of late years, that trifles at which another man would have smiled, had the power of disturbing and disconcerting him.

Supposing now that some mistake had been made ! Even if such a mistake were to be proved and owned not to be his, how awkward it would be, and how distressed and uncomfortable he should feel ! More than that, how disappointing if, after all the pains he had been at, first in donning his chilly dress suit on that cold, comfortless evening, and then in groping his way

from street to street till he stood on the threshold of his destination, it should appear that he had better have bided at home !

Go home he should and would, and that upon the instant, should matters thus turn out; even though so speedy and unexpected a reappearance at his lodgings meant nothing better than returning to a slice of cold meat and the colder looks of his landlady. Nothing should keep him. No earthly consideration should induce him to remain, if pressed out of pity to do so.

The very possibility of this happening made him hot and cold at once; and he was just turning over in his mind the question of ringing the bell and making some preliminary inquiries from his friend, the civil old major-domo who had seemed to know and welcome him, when the door at the far end of the apartment opened briskly, and in stepped a charming young girl, robed in white, flowers at her throat and waist, fan and gloves in her hand.

With infinite satisfaction Paul beheld her enter. She was to him an angel of hope, and the earnest of better things to come.

Obviously she, like himself, was arrayed for company ; and whether he saw in her another guest too soon arrived, or whether she were a temporary inmate of the mansion sent down to apologize and explain, was a matter of no moment. She was not surprised to see him ; he was in his proper place ; all was right.

“ I hope you have not been here long,” began a bright young voice, and at the same moment a small hand was extended frankly. “ We hardly thought you would be able to come at all. We got caught in the fog ourselves, and were kept out so late that no one is ready yet but me. I do hope you have not been waiting long,” and she looked at Paul, who in his turn, looked at her.

She was very pretty—oh, so pretty ! All at once he felt sure that he had never seen an eye more sparkling, a smile more enchanting. The rosy flush on either cheek

was softness and freshness itself. The parted lips betrayed a glimpse of pearls within. And then she had tripped in so lightly, and up and spoke to him so blithely, and looked so straight into his face with ne'er an attitude nor a tremor, that he felt—what did he not feel? For poor Paul was by nature susceptible to female charms, and in his Oxford days had never been without some fair one to sigh for and smile at, whereas now, now it was but seldom he spoke to a woman at all. Small wonder then, that having come to consider beauty and youth were no longer for him, he should scarce know how to demean himself, how to look and speak and play his part, when thus all at once bewildered and confronted.

“Lady Jane was so glad when she heard that you had come,” ran on the little lady fluently. “Knowing what a long way you had to drive, and that the fog was probably very bad in some of the parts you would have to pass through”— (“Oho!” thought Paul. “What’s this?” pondered he.) “Lady Jane had almost

given you up," concluded Lady Jane's spokeswoman.

Paul bowed. ("Who the dickens is Lady Jane?" said he, to himself.)

Then his companion took up the thread again. Had he driven his own horses? Had he driven himself?

No, he had not driven himself.

How had he found his way?

It had been very difficult to find his way.

By what route had he come?

Upon his honour, he could not tell; he had come somehow.

Had the fog been as thick in the country as it was in the town?

He—he supposed it had.

All the time Paul felt as if he were under a spell. It must soon, he knew, be broken. It might be broken at any moment. Plainly there was here the very thing he had dreaded—a mistake, a blunder, of which he was the victim. The warmth, and the welcome, and the sweet ringing voice, and upward gaze of the soft eyes were not by rights for him, but for some

one else—some other man—wretched upstart—who had been bidden to that house (a house far, far too good for him;), who lived in the country (where it was to be hoped he would remain;), who drove his own horses (and might, and probably would, meet with an accident by doing so;), who was expected by Lady Jane, and who, if he had not failed her ladyship, might appear at any moment to brand him, Paul Barnaby, as an impostor and supplanter.

So be it—but at least he would not anticipate the gentleman. It would be time enough to explain and apologize when explanation and apology were required; and, accordingly, he sat down.

“It has been such a dull day,” confided his new friend, doing the same; “it has been simply awful, has it not, Trusty?” to a lazy, sleepy pug, who, seeing his youthful mistress perch on the fender-stool, crawled drowsily on to her lap. “I wished I could go to sleep as Trusty does,” continued the speaker, pulling the ears of her favourite. “We yawned

through the morning, and then when the afternoon brightened for a little, and I had persuaded Lady Jane she ought to go out, lo and behold ! we got caught in the fog. It was rather fun, that,—at least I thought so. When we were somewhere in Trafalgar Square, we could not see a dozen yards in front of us. We could hear the trampling of horses, and the men shouting, and it was—lovely.”

“Was it ?” said Paul, laughing. For the life of him he could think of no more brilliant response.

“I suppose you did not like it ?” Miss stole a glance at her companion. He was very handsome, she thought. He had a beautiful moustache. He looked at her kindly.

“Did it make you nervous ?” was her next suggestion.

Paul smiled. (“What a nice smile ! What a nice face ! What a nice man !”)

The little lady smiled herself. (“What a sweet smile ! What a sweet face ! What a sweet, fair, beautiful girl !”)

Nothing more was needed.



Move? Rise? Go away? Cut short the rare pleasure of that unexpected, unpremeditated coalition?

Never. What were the Phillimores to Paul, or he to them, that he should throw away a moment such as this? It seemed to him now perfectly, absolutely inexplicable that but a brief quarter of an hour before, he should have been complacently regarding the prospect of being ushered into a full and noisy room, told off subsequently to hand some dull, unsympathetic woman in to dinner, and let in for a long, tiresome evening afterwards. How much, how infinitely preferable was it to be sitting where he was in the low light of this quiet place, listening to that soft, babbling strain of girlish music, and watching the flickering shadows which fell hither and thither athwart that tender, youthful form.

For once luck had been on his side. Could he baulk his luck?

Not he.

He drew nearer to his fender-stool. Afterwards he distinctly remembered all

he said, and all that was said to him. He never pretended that he had been so much amazed and confused as to lose his presence of mind on this, the turning-point of his life ; nay, he maintained, and maintains to this day, that he never was more thoroughly and completely wide-awake, and that but for his being so—but we will not anticipate.

At length the crash came.

Not in the form in which it might have been chiefly anticipated, but in one nevertheless sufficiently distinct and unwelcome, namely, in the appearance *in propria personâ* of the very Lady Jane so often referred to by the one speaker, so persistently ignored by the other.

She had not hurried herself, and a full half-hour had thus elapsed ere she followed her messenger to the drawing-room, a half-hour never to be forgotten by either, and equally ill-deserved, as we shall see, by both.

“ Gracie, you still here ? ” cried the new-comer in a pleasant old voice, which, though now raised in remonstrance, was

still in keeping with a pleasant old face and comely figure ; “ what are you thinking of ? Fly—my child—fly. That’s right,” as there was a momentary rustle, a flash past Paul, and then darkness—to him. “ That’s like Gracie exactly,” proceeded the speaker, advancing up the room ; “ but dear Ernest, you must excuse me, I am so sorry, so ashamed to be late ; only you were a little before your time you know—”

It was only at this point that the voice suddenly ceased.

“ Dear Ernest ” had risen from the low, deep chair in which he had been sitting hitherto, and now stood out to view. The strange thing, stranger than all the rest, was this ; that as he stood there, all in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, the timid, troubled, anxious-minded Paul Barnaby was gone, and in his place was a gay, handsome, dauntless fellow, with a smile still lurking about his blue eyes, and a dozen ready excuses hanging on the tip of his tongue.

He did not wait to be spoken to. With

all the grace and frankness of his prosperous youth renewed, and with not a trace of guilty self-consciousness or tell-tale embarrassment, all was explained, all at least with a single reservation—not one word was said as to the name of the friends whom the truant was playing false.

Do not be hard upon him. He had now but one hope, one desire—to stay where he was.

Were he to disclose the truth, could he with decency remain another instant? He was waited for, far too near. Within a few feet of where he now stood, his presence was due and urgently demanded, and yet—he could not go. That draught of pleasure previously so inviting, had now grown tasteless and insipid to his fancy; he had sipped a sweeter cup. And he had so far kept his secret fast. No word had been dropped, nor allusion let fall which could shed further enlightenment, even when it had been allowed, and most reluctantly allowed that he was not the man he should be, nor in the place where he should have been.

“I have lost my way in the fog,” Paul had owned with an easy air, as though it was an every-day occurrence, “and have, it appears, found my way in at the wrong door. I cannot possibly go now before making my apologies to the lady of the house, and as I shall not think of braving the elements further, but retreat to my own quarters,” with a dismal face calculated to excite any soft-hearted maiden’s sympathetic tenderness; “it really does not signify about the time.”

This had just been explained when the lady of the house made her appearance, and the repetition of it followed as a matter of course.

“I am afraid I have done a very extraordinary thing,” said the young man very respectfully. “It seems I have lost myself in this terrible fog; and being on my way to dine out in your neighbourhood, have mistaken this house for that of my friends. I have only been once in theirs before, and have but an indistinct recollection of it. It seemed,” looking round, “very like this. I trust my intrusion may

be pardoned. I could not go," very emphatically, "without rendering the explanation to—to—"

"To me," said Lady Jane, promptly. "Oh, certainly. I—I am very sorry. But the truth is that we, on our part, have also made a mistake—at least my servants have. They informed me that a young relation whom I am expecting to dine with me to-night had arrived, and I sent down Miss Clare, the young lady who was here just now, to receive him. Did she not?"—and she looked her interrogations.

"I think the young lady shared in the mistake—at first," replied Paul, demurely; "but we had just come to an understanding when you entered. ("Very much of an understanding," he added, internally; "we were getting on first-rate, when you appeared, to spoil the sport, old lady. You might have stayed away a little, a very little longer.")

All his energies were, however, now bent on making good his stay.

"I can understand the whole per-

fectly," cried his new friend, on whom neither the good looks nor courteous demeanour of the stranger were thrown away. "My nephew, as it happens, has not been to see me before, as he has only just returned from India, and he has been away many years. None of my present household know him; and they quite naturally took you for him. You, on your part, being shown in—"

"And my name was not asked," hinted Paul.

"Really? It is quite amusing;" and the old lady smiled in the pleasantest manner—"quite amusing," reiterated she.

Then there was a pause, and Paul prepared to bow himself out.

"Have you far to go, may I ask?" murmured Lady Jane, compassionately.

"Oh, I shall not attempt it." Nothing could have been more decided than the shake of the delinquent's head. "I should not think of intruding upon my friends, who, no doubt, have quite given me up by this time. I might blunder again;

and the best thing I can do now is to *try*" (the rogue emphasized the "try") "to find my way back to my own lodgings as well as I can."

"Lodgings!" repeated Lady Jane, under her breath. "Lodgings? Oh—h?"

And Paul saw his shaft had gone home.

("Lodgings, poor fellow;" commiseration was written on every line and wrinkle of the kind old face. "Lodgings. An empty grate, a cold hearth, wretched fare, and a lonely evening.") "And on this frightful night too," murmured she, half aloud.

He affected not to hear.

"My friends will understand my non-appearance, and no doubt there will be plenty of others kept away as well as I," he observed, with an air of forced cheerfulness. "But I intrude too long upon your forbearance," again attempting to pass, "I must make the best of my way home—"

"Not without some dinner,"—it was announced at the moment; "you must at least have some dinner."



“I could not think of it; thank you, exceedingly, but—” But, of course, the matter ended as it should have done, and was meant to do.

“Give me your arm, if you please, and allow me to ask your name, and tell my own. I am Lady Jane Crewe, and this is my house and my sister Lady Agatha’s. Lady Agatha is an invalid, and dines upstairs, but we shall find her in the drawing-room after dinner.” They were now upon the staircase. “I fear we shall be but dull company, and a poor substitute for a pleasant dinner-party, but, at least, we shall be better than wandering about the streets,” smiling benevolently.

(“To say nothing of a certain other inmate of your mansion whom we shall find below, I suppose,” quoth Paul inwardly, his heart full of exultation, and beating with triumph; “it is rather rash of you, my dear old lady,” further reflected he, “rather rash to admit a total stranger to your intimacy in this manner, especially with so lovely a girl beneath

your roof. She is no relation, evidently ; but still, she is stopping here, and you are thus bound to look after her. You must be more careful another time, Lady Jane Crewe ; you must, indeed,—another time.”)

Poor Paul ! His happiness and his triumph were short-lived. The dining-room was empty, and no third place was set at the table.

“ I hope I am not—not taking any one else’s place,” stammered he, all his new-born fluency deserting him. “ The—the young lady—”

“ No, she dines elsewhere to-night. You are taking my nephew’s place, if anybody’s, and as you have already done duty for him, it is only fit that the transposition should be continued.” She then dropped a few words of explanation to Paul’s first friend, the grey-headed domestic, who stood behind her chair, and whose manners precluded his expressing the surprise he must have felt ; in return he merely murmured a communication of which but two words reached the other

ears on the stretch to catch it—Miss Clare.

Miss Clare; he would have given the world to know where Miss Clare was, and why she was not present? Was she dining upstairs with Lady Agatha, and would she also be found in the drawing-room after dinner? It was the best he had now to hope for, certainly, but then, why was it so? Certainly Miss Clare was young, quite young, but still she had neither the appearance nor the manners of a school-girl. Why, then should she be treated as one? Scarcely had the question suggested itself, however, ere another flashed into his brain and carried conviction with it. Miss Clare, the sweet, frank, lovely girl to whom he had lost his poor, hungry, lonely heart, was not too youthful, but she was too lowly to sit at the same board with dames of high degree. Lady Jane and Lady Agatha Crewe's paid companion took a humbler place. That, then, was the cause of her hasty flight and non-reappearance. She had been sent down to pay the first civil-

ity, but she had not been intended to do more. She should have courtesied and retreated—glided in and glided out again. Certes, she should not, whatever she had done, have dropped down upon the low fender-stool and talked.

Poor child !

(“ Abominable ! ” cried Paul in his heart. “ And is she to be chained to the side of a cross old woman, she so young and beautiful ; is her life to be spent fetching and carrying for a tiresome, fretful invalid ? Is this other old tyrant to mount guard over her ”—but at the very moment the “ other old tyrant ” addressed him, and in spite of himself he felt ashamed of his unspoken thoughts.)

“ You have not yet told me your name,” said Lady Jane pleasantly.

“ Paul Barnaby. I ”—

“ Paul Barnaby ! ” The old lady dropped her fork with a start. “ Paul Barnaby ! But no”—after a momentary pause—“ no, it is so unlikely, so improbable that—still, what was your mother’s name, if I may put the question ? I once knew an Anne Barnaby—”

"That was my mother's name."

"Anne Franklin Barnaby?" cried Lady Jane, eagerly.

"Certainly. Anne Franklin Barnaby."

"And did you never hear her speak of me? Of her old friend Jane Crewe. Why, if it could be, if it really should be that you are the son of my dear, dear Anne Barnaby—" he could see that her hands were trembling and the diamonds on her thin fingers sparkling and dancing with the movement—"surely you must have heard her speak of me," she cried.

"I never heard her speak of anybody," replied Paul, quietly. "She died a few months after I was born."

For a moment there was silence, as each was lost in thought. The old lady's eyes were dropped, and memory was evidently at work, while Paul also pondered over some faintly shadowed recollections of the past.

"I knew that Anne was long since dead," said Lady Jane at last, with a sigh; "but I had forgotten how long it was. And for years I—we have lost sight of the

rest of her family. Then, I never knew much of her husband, your father, and it seems to me that I heard little or nothing of him after Anne's death. A few years ago, however—surely we heard something a few years ago?"—

"You heard," said Paul, slowly, "that is, you probably heard, that my father was ruined, that he had become a bankrupt, and that he—he had died, died of a broken heart. If you heard that, Lady Jane, you heard the truth."

Lady Jane put out her hand and laid it upon his. "Yes," she said, softly; "yes, my dear. That was what we heard."

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul Barnaby went home that night in a strange bewilderment of mind.

He had passed an evening which, under other circumstances, would have been not only solacing and inspiriting, but brimful and overcharged with good omens.

Never again would he call his entertainers cross old women, or tyrants. In Lady Agatha—the peevish, fretful invalid of his imagination—he had found the

exact counterpart of his most amiable hostess of the dinner-table, and both had been to him—he could hardly trust himself to think of what they had been to him. It was years since he had met with anything like it; and how differently now, and with what infinitely greater gratitude was such kindness received.

He felt himself in a new world. He had been rejoiced over as though he had been a prodigal—yet a prodigal blameless. He had been listened to, deferred to, and bent before as though he had been an oracle. One sister had produced a reminiscence, and another a relic. He himself, upon reflection, had been able to do his part and recall dim visions of two faded portraits, carefully treasured among his dead parent's things, and somewhere to be found, if looked for—portraits which he thought, he fancied, he felt nearly sure bore the names of Jane and Agatha Crewe.

Might he bring them to be seen and pronounced upon?

Of course he might.

Might he come occasionally late in the afternoon? He could not get away from his work early.

He might come at any hour he chose. They would always be at home to him, always. It was to be understood that they were to be looked upon as his mother's friends, and his own; he was free to come and go at any day, at any time.

He had not dared to trust himself to speak at this.

All the time not a word had been dropped as to Miss Clare, and no Miss Clare had ever again been visible. The humble companion she must be, but even as such he would no longer pity her. Some good reason, no doubt, there was for her being out of sight on the present occasion; she might be entertaining friends of her own in another apartment; she was certainly dressed for company; and if so, how unreasonable to suppose she could leave them just because he was there. Clearly she had been caught tripping, lingering with him by the fireside



on their first acquaintance ; but as clearly it had needed only Lady Jane's entrance to remind her of some forgotten engagement. It mattered not. He should see her again some time ; perhaps soon, perhaps often. Before he went to bed that night he sought out the pair of forgotten miniatures, portraits of two blushing, blue-eyed girls, whose names, dimly discernible on the other side, were, he perceived with a throb of delight, identical with those of the gentle, gray-haired women who called themselves his mother's friends. With these he went to call in Portland Place the very next afternoon.

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“And now, my dear Agatha, do for goodness' sake not go and spoil all. I have taken the greatest pains about it, and it would really be too bad if, after all, you cannot keep up the illusion a little longer. What harm does it do ? What can it signify that it is a little trouble, when it is to do so much good ? You say you do not like his thinking of Gracie as other than she is, and neither should I, if it

were not for the very difficult position she is placed in; but really, considering how anxious we have been to preserve her from heiress-hunters, and to let her be known and loved for her own sake entirely, it does seem as if a kind Providence had done for us what we should never have been able to accomplish for ourselves. To have had it noised abroad that the dear child had been left with a large independent fortune would have been the very first step toward her making an unfortunate marriage. She is the dearest, best of girls, but *all* girls are headstrong on this point; and I own that what with her beauty, and high spirits, and aptitude for making friends here, there, and everywhere, I have been on the tenter-hooks as to what might be the end of it. On the first evening when Paul Barnaby by accident came to our house, I saw in a moment, both by his manner and hers, that they had been, as young people will be, attracted by each other even at first sight; and knowing nothing of him for the first half-hour, I was thankful she

should have had that engagement to take her away, and was really vexed that she should have been deliberately late for it. But as soon as I discovered that Paul was Anne Barnaby's son, and such a son, too," continued the speaker, burning with excitement, "the idea at once flashed through my mind, what should prevent his marrying our dear Gracie if he could love her, and she him? Quite evidently he knew nothing of her being our ward. Indeed, he knew nothing whatever of any of us. We can both testify to his entire disinterestedness, can we not?"

Lady Agatha nodded.

"Then," proceeded her sister with keen enjoyment of her own eloquence—"then, my dear, I know what you will say. You will say, why prolong the deception? What more is to be gained by it? Now, my dear Agatha, I will tell you my reasons. If I know Paul Barnaby, as soon as he were to hear that Grace Clare is our rich and well-born ward, instead of our poor and dependent companion, his tongue would be tied for ever. Then,

what could we do? We could not speak for him. We could not propose for him. As it is, I think, I *think* he will speak very soon now, because although he has not enough to marry a fine lady upon, he is not too poor but that he can make a home for a penniless orphan such as he takes Gracie to be. Lately he has had some addition made to his salary. He himself told me so, and by his manner of telling it, I feel sure that he considers a difference already made in his position, a difference sufficient to warrant his—”

“His proposing to Gracie,” exclaimed Lady Agatha, seizing the opportunity to get in a word at last. “My dear Jane, it would be too delightful. It is too ridiculous. That he should think *she* could marry on a few hundreds a year! That he should ask one of the greatest fortunes of England to accept his—”

“His heart.” It was Lady Jane’s turn again. “And the whole thing is so perfect,” she added. “He knows none of our friends. He never goes into society, and I dare say he has never mentioned our

names to any one. Consequently no one has ever been able to undeceive him. Meantime we, on our part, have been able to satisfy ourselves as to all that we, as Gracie's guardians, are bound to know of his character, and mode of life. Poor fellow! Poor Paul! The more we heard, the more our very hearts burned within us, did they not? Such a sad story as it was; and he so good and patient through it all! Every one had a kind word for him; it mattered not whom we asked. Every one seemed to feel for him, and pity him. They little guessed why we wished to know. I would not for worlds and worlds that any human being had suspected—but I am positive that no one did suspect. How amazed they would have been; and—oh, my dear Agatha, what a happy day it would be—”

The door opened. “A happy day, did I hear you say, my dear Lady Jane?” cried a joyous voice behind her, “A happy day? Yes indeed! Happy for me, and—”

‘For me too,’ cried a shrill little pipe,

proceeding from a pair of rosebud lips close beside the first speaker. "Paul and I—"

"Paul and you!" cried Lady Jane, trembling with excitement.

"Paul and you?" almost shrieked Lady Agatha, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

Both their kind old faces were beaming, and their kind old hands were stretched out.

"I am a very poor man," said Paul Barnaby, humbly, "but this dear child is content to take me as I am, and for what I am. I cannot give her much beyond my love, my care, and my truest, tenderest anxiety for her happiness; but if that will suffice"—and he looked around with something of the wistful, piteous gaze of former times, for the momentary intoxication when Love is all and nothing counts besides, was passing off, and a terrible, nameless fear was beginning to creep into his heart. These others, had they the power, and, if so, would they, could they have the will to thwart his new-found happiness? They looked—he could hardly

say how they looked ; but a chill forboding fell upon his spirit. Oh, his poverty, his poverty !

“I know, no one better knows how little I have to offer,” he murmured.

The sisters coughed. Tears sprang to Gracie's eyes. They looked at one another. No one of them looked at Paul.

He thought he had wound himself up to face something of this. Night after night he had lain awake weighing with his conscience the question as to whether or not he had the right to do as he had done ; half beside himself with love and longing, he had yet held back, and might have held back forever, in spite of the little rift in the cloud alluded to by Lady Jane, had not a sudden opportunity arisen, and “opportunity creates a sinner,”—he had succumbed to the temptation of finding himself alone with his beloved. Now in the pause that followed his little speech, he fancied he read mute disapproval and disappointment. His heart sank.

“You cannot do much for a wife, you

confess," said Lady Jane, at last; "my dear Paul"—(they called him "Paul" now)—"my dear Paul, has it never occurred to you that this being the case, it would be wiser, more prudent, more expedient for you to seek to win the affections of some lady with a—a competence of her own—*something* at least, if not a fortune—some little independent"—

"Never," cried Paul, with the ring of a trumpet in his tones,—“never! I am not come to that yet, Lady Jane. I am poor enough, it is true, but at least I am not a hypocrite and a fool. I would a thousand times rather live and die a lonely man than try to better my fortunes by seeking the hand of one to whom I could not give my heart. No rich wife for me. Her whom I wed, I must love, as I do love, and ever will love”—and he took the hand of the girl by his side with a glad, proud smile which needed not to be put into words.

"You are quite resolved on that?" said Lady Jane, with the faint colour spreading over each faded cheek. "Yes, I see it



in your face. Your mind is made up. Well, so be it. Gracie, you must give him up."

Paul started.

"I must indeed, dear Lady Jane." But in Gracie's voice, marvel of marvels, there was no undertone of regret, nor renunciation. "If he still says 'no rich wife for me,' I must indeed;" she added, still more gaily. "You and I must part, Paul. It is hard to part so soon, is it not? But it is your own doing. For, Paul, you have been dreaming when you thought what you thought of me. You have been cheated, Paul. We have all cheated you, Lady Jane, and Lady Agatha, and I. None of us are guiltless. What do you say to that, Paul? No rich wife for you! That means no *me* for you. Do you not understand me? What, not yet, Paul? Must I make it plainer yet?"

She had to do so, and the others had to help her, and even then—even when every word that was uttered was more frankly outspoken and to the purpose than that which had gone before it, even when the

countenances of the speakers left it in no shadow of doubt that they were well aware they were imparting tidings calculated to bewilder and amaze—he found it hard, almost impossible to believe.

But it is pleasant to record what followed. It is good to know that Paul Barnaby was no sentimental, melodramatic youth, ready to protest and swear that he would have preferred to have his fair one a pauper, and thus prove the loyalty of his soul.

Paul neither said nor thought anything of the sort. At first, indeed, he said nothing at all; he merely looked from one to the other, growing rather pale as he did so, and then all at once he turned his back upon everybody, and went and stood by the window looking out.

It took him a few minutes to master himself. But presently he returned, and with his eyes upon the floor, thus delivered himself,—

“I cannot help being glad,” he said. “I understand your motive, and—and Gracie deserved to have such a test put to me.

It is not only about the money, of course, but—" he paused ; he hardly liked, even now to confess that although he had allowed himself to love the poor companion, he could not but prefer to wed the ward and equal of Lady Jane and Lady Agatha Crewe.

"I cannot imagine how I came to make such a blunder," he murmured.

"It was a night of blunders," responded Gracie, merrily. "Perhaps we are not quite at the end of your blunders, yet, Mr. Paul Barnaby. Where were you engaged to dine upon that first evening when you stumbled in here, and fell on your feet—"

"And fell in love."

"And fell in every way. In Mrs. Phillimore's estimation most of all."

"Mrs. Phillimore's ?" said Paul, with a start.

"Mrs. Phillimore's. You see we know all about it. We know both where you *should* have been, and also that you never informed the poor Phillimores where you *had* been."

“How—how did you know this?” demanded Paul, with open eyes.

“Simply because I took your place on that evening, sir. I was not hidden away in another room of this house, as you supposed. I was dining with Major and Mrs. Phillimore next door, and I was the only person invited who did not fail them. As *you* kept your little secret, *I* kept mine. As you have never mentioned the Phillimores to us, we have never mentioned them to you. But we know them very well—very well indeed. And if you had only allowed that it was to them you were engaged, you and I might have gone in together, and had a merry evening. But you were so very wise, and prudent, and reticent, that you—you made another blunder.”

“Good Heavens!” ejaculated Paul. “And how—how did Lady Jane not tell me?” added he, turning as he spoke to Lady Jane herself.

“I saw no reason for telling you,” rejoined the old lady briskly. “You were a stranger, and it was nothing to you where

Miss Clare had gone. After we discovered that you were Anne Barnaby's son, I might certainly have mentioned it, but I was so taken up about that, that I thought no more of Gracie while you were with us. As soon as Gracie came home—you had left before she came in, you know—she told us, as a good joke, of your throwing the Phillimores over; and as this little puss"—stroking the soft brown curls by her side—"as she, womanlike, Paul, had divined by instinct what had been your motive for doing so, she had also had the quickness to be silent about it. The Phillimores have no idea to this day that you were on the other side of their dining-room wall, while they sat bemoaning your absence on Gracie's account, and calling you a pusillanimous fellow in their hearts. Mrs. Jack Phillimore is a kind-hearted woman, Paul," and Lady Jane's gray eyes twinkled archly.

"I understand," said Paul. "She too thought I stood in need of a rich wife, Lady Jane."

"And I could hardly keep from laughing

in their faces," protested Gracie, laughing now out of the fullness of her happy heart. "Indeed, I could hardly keep my countenance. I did not dare to lift my eyes sometimes. There were they lamenting and protesting; abusing you heartily too, Paul; and showing most evidently *why* they were put out, and *why* they minded more about your not coming, than all the rest put together;—and there was I demurely sitting eating my dinner as if I heard nothing, and had nothing whatever to do with it! Oh, it was altogether too funny, and too nice! But I had guessed who the Mr. Barnaby was in a moment, though you had never told me your name. And then, when I came home, here were these two dears"—looking lovingly round—"raving about you. Oh, it was too delightful! We planned out the whole thing, then. We did not exactly *say* it, you know, but we just understood each other. It has been such fun. Why, Paul, you stupid Paul, if I had been a poor girl, could I have worn such frocks as this? Should I have had expensive masters for music and drawing?

And gone to concerts, and theatres, and lectures, and wherever I wanted? Oh, Paul, if you had not been such a blundering, stupid Paul—”

“You would never have won Gracie Clare,” said Lady Jane Crewe.

“And you would never have won our consent either,” chimed in Lady Agatha. All this time, the poor invalid had been rather out of it, and felt now as if she must get in a word edgeways. “They may talk about your being stupid, Paul,” quoth she now, with a world of wisdom in every accent, “Gracie may choose to pretend to think you stupid—I don’t in the least believe she does, but that doesn’t matter—one thing I know, if anybody wants to do a really clever thing, let them go and make a few of Paul Barnaby’s blunders.”

# THE LITTLE TRAGEDY IN GREEN STREET.



## SCENE I.

Drawing-room in Mayfair. Enter COLONEL THEOPHILUS STACER, handsome man of forty, with a dash of gray on the temples; and MISS LILLA DELANCY, sweet girl of nineteen, with no visible temples at all.

LILLA, lovely but irate : “No, I couldn’t have believed it! no, I couldn’t! No Theophilus, all is over between us; you have deceived me, duped me, made a fool of me—”

THEOPHILUS. “A fool of myself rather.”

LILLA. “After you had yourself heard me, and ever so many other people had heard me too, say that I would never, never, *never* marry a widower, and you to



be a widower all the time! O Theophilus, I couldn't have thought it of you,—and you to be a widower all the time!”

THEOPHILUS. “My darling, I own—”

LILLA. “O yes, you own it *now*—now when you have got me to love you and all! And you know, you know,” sobbing, “how I hate widowers, and if I had ever had the least, the very least idea of this, I would have hated you! But—now—when—I have—got to—to love—you—”

THEOPHILUS. “Yes, now when you have got to love me, you find you have got to forgive me too.”

LILLA. “How—how could you do it?”

THEOPHILUS. “I was tempted, and I fell. Your prejudice—may I call it prejudice—on the subject was well known—better known than my history; I had but to hold my tongue, and no one would inform you of my early and unhappy marriage. It was soon over, and as I had no children, the very memory of it had almost passed away; if my old brother officer, Jack Doodles, had only not happened to be in

England at this moment, and to be going about telling everybody—”

LILLA, with a start, tears flying to right and left: “Then, O Heavens, every one knows as well as I! O, this is too dreadful, this!” wrings her hands.

THEOPHILUS, very gently: “I made a great mistake, and I am most heartily sorry for it; but, Lilla, you will not for this—” takes her hand, draws her within his arm, is just about to—

The door flies open, and in whirls the Lady Blanche Malingerer, the veriest Old Cat in town: has an eye to Stacer for herself, no objection to widowers, and every sort of objection to girls of nineteen, Lilla Delancy in particular.

LADY BLANCHE stops short, and throws up both her hands: “Goodness—gracious—mercy—saints and angels—*O, la! what have I done?* O, we know all about it, all about it, you naughty, wicked, gay deceiver! And *this* is the reconciliation! O, pardon on my knees, I fly like the wind! And yet it is too delightful! O you base man, to play her such a trick as

that—ha! ha! ha! Delicious! Come, my sweet Lilla, join in the laugh. What though he did hoax you just a little bit? O, fie! what a face! The tempest isn't over yet, then? I am just a little premature, am I? Then send for me again when it is all smooth, and I'll just cree-eep in. Ta-ta!" kisses her hand: "off I run!"

LILLA, quivering with passion, like a big lily knocked about by the wind: "*You* needn't run; *I* am going. Colonel Stacer, you may think that because I am only a foolish girl, and haven't seen the world, nor been *to India*," with scornful emphasis, "that you may cheat me and laugh at me in your sleeve, and make all my friends—"

A grimace from Lady Blanche.

LILLA, stamping with the prettiest little foot in the world: "But you are mistaken, sir! I hold myself free from this moment: anything I may have said last night—"

Deep interest on the part of Lady Blanche.

LILLA. "It cannot hold me now. A gentleman who under false pretences gains a lady's regards—"

Deep gravity on the part of Stacer.

LILLA. "Must understand that all is at"—*tremolo*—"an end—between them—when—the truth is out."

LADY BLANCHE. "*Bah!* nonsense! Hear the silly little birdie chirping its little ridiculous defiance!"

LILLA. "Ridiculous! Do you dare—"

LADY BLANCHE, retreating precipitately in mock fright: "O, I dare nothing, I dare nothing! Have pity! Colonel Stacer, let me hide behind you! O, she's coming!" Tries a little scream and clings to him. Stacer throws her off as if she were a wasp, and rushes from the room.

LILLA tragically: "Is he gone? O, is he gone?"

LADY BLANCHE dryly, all trace of either mirth or terror vanished: "Gone? No doubt about that, my dear."

LILLA, sinking back in a chair: "And I sent him away! And he will never come back again!"

LADY BLANCHE mockingly: "O, you want him back again already, do you?"

LILLA remembers herself: "No indeed! Want him back? Never, never, never do I wish to see his face more!"

LADY BLANCHE. "Come, come, my dear, there is no need to make-believe before *me*. And you are quite right, too. Theophilus Stacer is a catch in his way—five thousand a year and a fine-looking man, though a little, a *little* old for you, perhaps; but that is nothing to his being a widower—bless me! what am I saying? It is you yourself, you foolish child, who have set us all against widowers; and, to be sure, it was too bad of Theophilus—But there, we'll say no more. Take my advice, my dear, and welcome back the dear Colonel with your sweetest smile next time he comes."

LILLA, with dignity and resolution: "That's enough. I see you do not believe in me. Wait."

LADY BLANCHE, with renewed spirit: "Yes, I'll wait; I'm not afraid to wait; I shan't have to wait long. A very few

hours will see the gallant soldier advance again to the attack; the sly widower will try another trick. Now, my dear, *now* spare my ears," putting up her fingers to them. "No use, no use; shan't listen; he comes back, he comes back!" Escapes laughing and nodding. (Aside): "But if he *do*, it will be no thanks to me."

## SCENE II.

A week later. A little Drawing-room in Green Street. Everybody knows all about everybody, except the Host and Hostess, who are delightfully innocent and ignorant—only just passable, you know; in short, not quite "the thing."

Enter LADY BLANCHE MALINGERER and MISS DELANCY, almost the last arrivals.

LADY BLANCHE. "Are we the last? O, how shocking! *Not* the last? O, how lucky! Dear Mrs. Goodheart, who *have* you got here? Everybody. How d'ye do? how d'ye do? how d'ye do?" all round.

MISS DELANCY. "How d'ye do? how d'ye do?"

They seat themselves and conjecture who is to be their fate. The party is nearly complete, and is being rapidly coupled by Mr. Goodheart, florid, short-breathed, anxious, white-waiscoated; paper in hand, he has gone the round of the circle, but no one has yet been brought up to Miss Lilla Delancy. The door opens and—a thunderbolt falls. It admits Colonel Theophilus Stacer, late and hurried, and *he* is Miss Delancy's man.

He knows her? O, will he kindly take her in to dinner?

The gentleman bows, the lady bends; Theophilus feels his heart bumping against his waistcoat, Lilla's is throbbing in her throat; the eyes of the room are upon them, and—they know how to behave themselves.

THEOPHILUS. "A lovely day! So warm."

LILLA. "Delightful! So cool."

THEOPHILUS. "You have been—anywhere?"

LILLA. "Everywhere. I—I mean, I did not go out."

THEOPHILUS. "It was—ah—pleasanter indoors."

LILLA. "Pleasanter—ah—out of doors. Yes."

They are out upon the staircase.

THEOPHILUS hoarsely and low: "Lilla, this is *dreadful*! But what are we to do? We cannot have every one staring at us; we cannot let them triumph over us."

LILLA. "No, no; whatever we do, not that."

THEOPHILUS. "Can you put a brave front upon it? It is but for an hour."

LILLA energetically: "I can;" feels herself a heroine in distress, and dares the worst that misfortune can do. "I can, and I *will*."

THEOPHILUS. "I am so sorry for you—it is *for you* that I mind."

They are at the turning of the stair; Lilla trips over the mat in her earnestness and impressiveness.

"Pray—pray don't mind, Theoph—



Colonel Stacer ; it is—it is for you that I feel.”

THEOPHILUS confidentially : “ We shall have to speak to each other.”

A tiny pressure of the arm.

THEOPHILUS. “ You will speak to me ? ”

A nod.

They are at the dining-room door. Lady Blanche is there before them ; is there anything she can do to separate the pair ? It is really quite too *awful*, quite too *hideous* ! She can explain it to the Goodhearts afterwards ; turns round and says, “ Lilla, Lilla, my love, I know you hate the fire—or the sun—it is just in your eyes ; do come round and sit by me ; positively you must.”

OBTUSE HOST. “ No occasion, Lady Blanche. The blind can be let down.” (Aside) : “ Hang it all ! am I not to have the arrangement of my own dinner-table ? ”

WRETCHED HOSTESS, who has just learned the truth upstairs : “ Colonel Stacer, I am afraid I must ask you to—to come and sit here by me. It is so awkward—we are such an awkward

number ; but I fear I must part some one pair."

INDIGNANT HUSBAND, in an unmistakable "will-be-master-of-my-own-house" tone : "My dear, Stacer is seated. We do very well as we are."

COMPANY IN GENERAL (aside) : "Blundering idiot ! he sees nothing even yet !"

Tragedy proceeds : a deep gloom, a terrible shadow pervades the meal ; by the time the first course is over, every one who did not before know the frightful state of the case has been informed of it, and in consequence an intermittent fever of delight, alarm, and curiosity makes every other topic flat as a pancake. Who can talk while *that* is going on ? Who can do anything else than cast surreptitious glances up and down the board, varied by awful frowns and internal threats directed against the miserable author of the mischief ? One tongue, however, never flags, never tires, nor stops to rest ; and that is the tongue of Stacer. Stacer talks on, and on, *and on*. Stacer appears to have laid up a fund of information upon

every conceivable topic, to which he is now steadily giving vent; even when the ladies rise, and Lilla rises with them, and he gives her back her glove, which had fallen under the table, he talks still. How good he is, how kind, how thoughtful! And how very, very sorry she is for him!

But upstairs all the commiseration is for her.

“My *poor* child! My *dearest* Lilla! *How* unlucky! *Such* a mistake! Mr. Goodheart will never forgive himself!”

The last asseveration is Mrs. Goodheart’s, and she is nearly weeping.

LADY BLANCHE consolingly: “Yes, my dear Mrs. Goodheart, it was unfortunate, most unfortunate, and shows—ahem!—that people should be conversant with—with what goes on. Of course you did not know: another time you will try to know, will you not, my dear?”

MRS. GOODHEART warmly: “I will never ask people to meet each other again unless I know the day of their birth, and their godfathers and godmothers, and—and—” (sobs).

LILLA. "If I could only go home now!"

She can and shall go home: no need to wait for her carriage. Mr. Goodheart will be only too glad, too sorry, too thankful to do anything: he will see her home in a hansom, it will not take him ten minutes, a message will bring him out of the dining-room, and he can be back before he is missed; and Mrs. Goodheart *will* have it so.

All right: Goodheart is delighted.

It appears presently, however, that he did not go in that hansom. Stacer had to leave early, he said, and he was going Miss Delancy's way, and so there was no reason why—

LADY BLANCHE. "Why! Good Heavens! you did not send Lilla Delancy home in a hansom alone with Colonel Theophilus Stacer!"

GOODHEART peaceably: "It was better he than I, you know. He would be less missed. I put it to him."

What on earth does this mean? What has he done wrong? What is the matter? He looks blankly round on each in turn

plainly imploring information, pitiably at sea.

Matter! O, you born fool, you blind, thick-headed jackass! Matter! He is told shortly and sharply what is the matter. And here we draw the veil. We can picture him for the rest of the evening, wandering about the dim alleys, the back slums of the great, gay room, a miserable outcast, a despised, enlightened, bewildered pariah: we can see him cowering beneath every withering glance, shrinking from every eye, scarce venturing to return the cold "Good-night," far less to offer the parting arm: he has at heart, his afflicted family may dare to hope, the grace to feel his ignominy; he will never again in this world, they may rest assured, presume to meddle with matters so far beyond him: he is crushed, annihilated; a down-trodden reptile, a dead worm.

### SCENE III.

An hour later. Goodheart's Study.  
GOODHEART resuscitated, brought back to life, jolly as ever, radiant as ever,

laughing as he has often laughed before, but as no one had thought he would ever laugh again; and THEOPHILUS STACER shaking him by both hands, as if his great end in life were to tear elbow from shoulder, and shoulder from socket.

STACER. "Ha! ha! ha! *Ha! ha! ha!*"

GOODHEART. "*Ha! ha! ha!* HA! HA! HA!"

STACER. "Bravo, my kind old friend! Bravo! The most splendid success!"

GOODHEART. "Very fine, my brave young friend, very fine. The success lay all with *you*, though : or rather, you had the sweet, I the bitter, of the mixed cup."

STACER. "No one but you could have done it. You with your honest face and placid, guileless smile; you with your fatherly, benevolent, domineering manner—O, how I laugh to think of it! And no one, not even your own wife, to suspect you! Goodheart, you are an actor born! The talent lay latent until now, but—"

GOODHEART. "But I have to share the fate of all the truly great—to be mis-

understood. Never mind; you are happy."

STACER. "Happier than words can express. She is mine once more, and mine knowing all. I confessed everything to her before I asked her again, and we'll have no more secrets in future. No, Goodheart, I was bound to make one concealment pay the bad debt of the other. Lilla had refused to see me, to hear me, or to allow me a chance in any way of making up our quarrel; yet I knew that she loved me as I loved her, and was I to let our mutual happiness for life be spoilt by a whim? I had to resort to a stratagem: you were the only person I knew of who could and would help me, for you alone had had a real ignorance of the dilemma until informed of it by me myself; and so when I arranged with you this most successful dinner-party—"

GOODHEART. "And yet my wife tells me I am never to have a say in a dinner-party again!"

STACER. "Never again will you make such a point as you did at this. Never

again will you be appealed to by a wretch in such a sorry strait. And never again, I think I may venture to say, will you be regarded with such enthusiasm as you are now by the self-same wretch. How everything and every one played into our hands, Goodheart ! And Lilla herself to originate, all unconsciously, the very opportunity she was ripe for ! She was so sorry for me, so pitiful towards me, so grateful, so melting—in short, I had her fast. That hansom was the crowning glory of this glorious evening.”

GOODHEART. “ And yet for it was I more unmercifully belaboured than for all besides.”

STACER. “ Those were blows received in a noble cause ; they were right honourable scars, wounds to be Victoria Crossed ; you will parade them yet on the great day of our union. Where was I ? O, in the hansom with Lilla, who was flying from me, and whom you—yes, *you*—had so ruthlessly captured on my behoof. I bided my time ; we were silent for the full space of sixty seconds, or one whole minute, and



then—O, she will know the place again, I dare swear; 'twas where the wooden pavement is most smooth and noiseless, and where we met the full moon shining right into our faces. She could not get away, nor turn to hide herself: while I—that was my time, you know."

GOODHEART. "So now it is all settled?"

STACER. "And on a solid basis this time. The courtship began to-night, the wedding comes off in a month; and I think, Goodheart, I think, now that we have had our revenge on honesty, cheated truth, and exalted fraud, we have every cause to pride ourselves on the results of to-night's *little tragedy in Green Street.*"

## A TUMBLER OF MILK.

“Trifles make the sum of human things.”

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SYBIL was to dine late. She had never dined late in her life before. That is not to say that Miss Sybil Latimer had never been present during a part or even the whole of that solemn function ushered in nightly by the roll of the gong at eight o'clock. Sybil was an only child, and had her privileges, the chief of which was to be the companion of her parents at all times and seasons when not actually engaged in the pursuit of knowledge; but with that stern upholder of etiquette, her mother, all such liberty must be acknowledged as liberty, all relaxations and indulgencies recognized as relaxations and indulgencies, and even sitting up to dinner must never be termed “dining late.”

Thus up to the present time.

But Sybil was now trembling on the

verge of womanhood ; her eighteenth birthday, that great birthday in a girl's life, was at hand, and even Lady Georgina allowed that it was time to acknowledge as rights, what had hitherto been winked at as irregularities.

The world must be apprised that the heiress was about to step across the Rubicon.

On a like occasion, Lady Georgina's nieces, the blooming Mary and Isabella, who were Sybil's envy and admiration, had each been granted a ball of her own, a ball to which half the county had been invited, and at which the fair *débutante* had reigned as queen ; but a ball for Sybil was not to be contemplated for a moment.

“ For a delicate creature like her it would be madness, absolute madness,” quoth Colonel Latimer, who took to the full as much charge of his daughter as though she had had no other parent. “ My dear ” —to his wife—“ you would not, you surely would not think of it,” continued he, stammering with anxiety and consternation.

For the idea had been mooted in his presence, and had made the few remaining hairs on his head stand on end with fright.

Her ladyship, however, was quite of his own mind on the subject.

A ball was the last thing she would think of; Sybil would be sure to be overheated, overstrained, overdone in every way. A ball meant a vast amount of fatigue and risk, and a ball dress on a December evening every kind of ill to which the flesh is heir. Then for a ball the great rooms and all the long, echoing, draughty corridors with which Latimer Hall bristled, would have to be thrown open, and Sybil would have to thread them with the rest. Terrible thought. Last, but not least, who in the neighbourhood was there worthy of leading the heiress on to the floor?

Sir Robert Dovercourt certainly, but unluckily Sir Robert was not a dancing man, and was moreover seldom to be had when wanted. If wanted for a ball, or a picnic, or any sort of festal gathering of the proper, orthodox, family kind, the

young baronet might almost be reckoned upon to have "another engagement," and Lady Georgina was not the person to like being met by "another engagement." Failing Dovercourt, Godfrey Hanbury was the next in succession, and it was a long step from the one to the other. Sybil's mother, who thought hardly anybody could ever be good enough to touch the hem of her daughter's garment, drew up her own beautiful neck at the bare idea of Godfrey, and she and her husband finally agreed together in parental conclave that a dinner-party—a formal, frigid, stately dinner-party, at which all the old silver and china should be in use, and for which the invitations should be issued weeks beforehand—was the only suitable, sensible, and rational mode of celebrating their darling's entrance into the world.

"Sybil," quoth the old soldier, shaking his grizzled head—he had not married early, and was now in his sixty-fifth year—"Sybil is a fragile flower; no adverse wind must ever blow upon her. Balls and theatres are for girls of another kind.

Great, strong, robust young women," proceeded he, with ineffable contempt, "may be able to enjoy such amusements, and derive no injury from them. I am not speaking for others. I am not dictating to other parents; but our daughter is cast in a mould of her own. A delicate, shrinking, sensitive creature," waving his hand gently to and fro; "a mere puff of thistledown—that is our Sybil. She is a charge, a great charge. It is our duty to guard, protect, ward off every roughness, every sharpness from her tender frame. And now, now that she has reached the age when dangers of another kind are likely to assail her, we must redouble our exertions. Sybil will be sought after, run after, raced after. There will be a regular siege laid to Miss Sybil Latimer whenever she appears in public, and her lovely face—"

"Yet, would you believe it," said Lady Georgina, who had heartily agreed to all, "would you believe that my sister Diana spoke to me only yesterday about Sybil's want of colour, and asked whether I did

not think she would be the better for running about more in the open air? Imagine Sybil running about in the open air in mid-winter! As if I should ever be so mad as to risk my poor darling's health by such rashness! Only yesterday, you remember, we both fancied she had a cough after driving with me, yet I am sure I had the carriage-windows closed the whole time. The open air, indeed! The raw, damp, cold, December 'open air'! But that was Diana all over."

"Diana all over," echoed he. "Your sister thinks that all the family should be as tough and rough as her branch of it. Because she and her daughters are able for anything—"

"And they will certainly grow coarse, as I hinted yesterday. I was determined Diana should not have it all her own way. And as I could see plainly what was in her mind—indeed she almost said aloud that we overdid it in our care of Sybil—I had my answer. I said, 'My dear, your girls look almost *too* well. There is such a thing as looking *too* well. What a skin

gains in colour it often loses in delicacy. A skin cannot be too smooth. Does it not strike you that Isabel's skin is perhaps hardly quite as smooth as it was?' That was how I answered Diana."

"And very well you answered too. Yes, I think Isabel has too much bloom. At present, while she is quite young, this may be overlooked, for she is a pretty girl as girls go, though of course not equal to Sybil; but in a few years' time I would not answer for it that either of your nieces will not have developed too fully, that they will not have grown coarse, as you say, with all that walking, and riding, and skating, and tennis-playing. Your sister thinks it healthy. I am no great admirer of such healthiness myself," owned the Colonel, frankly.

"At any rate it would never suit our child," assented Lady Georgina. "I am thankful that nobody can interfere with us about her. Diana may do as she pleases with her own daughters, but it is rather too bad that she should wish to manage ours also. And imagine Sybil brought up like



Mary and Isabel! If anything were to happen to Sybil—" The door opened and Sybil entered.

A fragile-looking creature, as her father had said, pale, slight, and bending, with soft dark eyes that looked wistfully out upon the world, and a thoughtful brow, almost too pensive for one so young.

Sybil was seldom heard to laugh; it would have been too much to expect that a child so nurtured could laugh with any of the abandonment of youth, but the chiselled lips of her small, sensitive mouth would occasionally part in a smile, a smile so rarely sweet, so arch while yet so timid, so keen and apprehensive, while yet so tremulous, that people whose sole acquaintance with the heiress had hitherto been through the representation of her parents, or beneath their strictest supervision—we had almost said intervention—told each other that nobody as yet knew anything about the real Sybil Latimer, and that, carefully hid as this being was from mortal view, she yet existed in other form than that presented to the world.

“If one could only get *at* her!” sighed the girl’s own next of kin, the Lady Diana, and Mary, and Isabel, above alluded to. “If one could only *ever* meet Sybil without those two pairs of eyes which hover over her from hour to hour!”

“If we do but propose a walk, or a ride, or a talk upstairs,” cried the lively Isabel, “Aunt Georgina has a thousand objections on the tip of her tongue. It is Sybil’s hour for lying down, or her hour for taking her tonic, or her hour for something else. The amount of medicine of which Sybil partakes in the course of the week would keep a poor man’s family, minus other food, for the same length of time. And if she do but stir from the drawing-room fireside for half an hour, it is ‘Where is Sybil?’ from Uncle Henry, or ‘Have you seen Sybil?’ from Aunt Georgina, until some one has to own up as to where their darling was last seen and heard; and then the poor thing is hunted out and run in again, and penned down in an easy chair, with a shawl hung over the back if there be but a breath from the door-

way; and she is begged to say whether she is not cold, nor chilly, nor shivering,—when she is far more likely to be faint from the heat, and suffocating for want of air.”

“Her poor little white face quite haunts me sometimes,” subjoined Lady Diana.

“And her voice, mamma; such a little low, soft, toneless voice. I don’t think Aunt Georgina would even like her to speak so that she could be heard across the table. Oh, I know she thinks we chatter too much, and too fast, and too everything, but I do wish poor Sybil might be allowed not to whisper.”

“I seldom even hear her whisper.”

“She is afraid of you, mamma; she is afraid of us all. I suppose,” said Isabel, with a little blush, “I suppose she has found out that we do laugh about her—not exactly at her, no one could laugh *at* Sybil—but about her : about all the odd things they make her do, and the clothes they make her wear, and the way they treat her altogether. If only Sybil could be got away

from Uncle Henry and Aunt Georgina, if only she—”

“It is of no use your making schemes for your cousin, my love,” interrupted her mother, promptly. “I have tried all I could do, and said all I could say, and it came to nothing. Worse than nothing, it created a soreness on the subject. So that now my tongue is tied, and though I have set others on, to see whether they might not have more success, it has been equally in vain. Nothing will open the eyes of your uncle and aunt. They will go their own way,—and all I can say is, I hope they may not live to repent it.”

Such being the state of things at Latimer Hall, it will be understood why so much importance attached to the simple fact of Sybil's dining late on the occasion of her eighteenth birthday. Everything that the only child did, or thought, or felt was of importance. She was made to think of herself as the principal personage of the place, its pervading spirit, and the chief end of both her parents' lives.

Every habit, or rule, or law, had refer-

ence primarily to her ; and in her health, her comfort, and her convenience was found an interest which grew with every added year.

How such an exotic was ever to expand or develop mentally, how she was to thrive or flourish bodily had their sheltering arms been withdrawn, was a problem neither Colonel Latimer nor his wife cared to face. They were there to protect, support, hold between finger and thumb as it were, the gossamer-like creature given them for a child, and with their whole hearts they believed that nothing which care, affection, or unremitting watchful study could bestow upon their idol, was wanting on their part. The conviction was a just one—it was wisdom alone that was needed.

But oh! the martyrdom which that single want inflicted on a helpless victim!

Many and many a time would the pillow of the gentle girl be wet with tears of shame, grief, or disappointment, unsuspected by all. Many and many a time would the quiet obedience so unhesitatingly yielded send the stinging blood to her

check. Often and often would she hang her meek young head to hide the cloud which no endeavours could altogether keep from overshadowing her brow. From earliest days it had been so—she felt, she fancied, it must be so for ever. It was hers “not to make reply ;” hers “not to reason why ;” hers simply to suffer, trust, and love ; more, to smother all outward testimony of the sobs, the distress, which would have vent when none was by to view or hearken, when the candle was out at night, and only the form of the old nurse could be seen in the far distance of the next room, still and motionless, scarce venturing to stir hand or foot, lest the sound should disturb the supposed sleeper. Sybil would bury her face in the kindly pillow and weep freely then.

Oh, why was she so different from others? Why was her lot to be so strangely apart from that of all around her? No one was ever like her—she was never like the rest. How happy they must be! How ineffably lonely and dull she often was!

By-and-by conscience would begin to prick, however, and the poor child would tell herself she was the naughtiest, wickedest, most ungrateful being in the whole wide world ; that poor papa and mamma, against whom she was repining and fretting, loved her dearly, and only wanted her good in all they did—and the tears would flow afresh at this, the cruellest thought of all.

But they were different tears from those which had gone before. The hot, scalding drops which had blistered Sybil's cheeks as they ran, had had their own deep fount of bitterness in a sense of wrong and injustice, and with them no softening dews of penitence had mingled ; and as this secret fount was ever being fed afresh, it was little wonder that its waters would sometimes swell into a flood that well-nigh overflowed.

Scarce a day passed at one period of the girl's life but what it brought its own pang.

What agonies, for instance, would a showery afternoon cost the owner of that

curiously cut, carefully invented outer garment which never failed to be handed into the carriage, or hung across the Colonel's arm, when Sybil was of the party ! Happless Sybil, who must presently suffer herself to be enfolded in the loathed wrap, would almost sooner have died than have faced her cousins thus, had the choice been offered her. Yet how often had the very thing most dreaded taken place—the meeting which brought with it such throes of shame, actually come to pass ! From pure compassion, open inquiries and mirth had come at length to be suppressed, but what signified it ? Sybil knew—well did she know—how it would be the moment her back and the backs of her parents were turned. What bootèd it that, all unconscious of the curled corners of Lady Diana's mouth, “ We have had such an excellent cloak made for Sybil,” the proud father would say, exhibiting it and her with a satisfaction unconcealed ? Lady Diana would, it is true, only nod in answer, and he would perceive nothing ; but Sybil knew that her aunt could not speak for laughing.



“Turn round, my dear,” the Colonel would run on, “turn and let your aunt see the other side. Look, Diana; do you see the cut of that? No cold air can penetrate in there, can it? Nor creep up that sleeve, eh, can it? Nor chill the back of the neck? All our own idea, her mother’s and mine. Made to order. Made on purpose for Sybil. Not another cloak like it in London.” Lady Diana would not answer him a word, but Sybil almost fancied a caress in the hand laid upon her own humbled, drooping little shoulders presently.

Again it would be the anxious restrictions, cautions, and reminders of her fond guardians which, well enough for a child of six, embittered the ear of the maiden of sixteen.

If Sybil were lunching out—for this dissipation in a sociable neighbourhood would now and again be permitted under the loving care and surveillance of the elderly couple—every morsel would be watched, and every dish inspected. A throbbing little heart would be almost sure

to be set a-going ere the meal was over by something such as this, "Sybil, my darling, you know what Dr. Rhubarb said. Anything the least rich at table was to be strictly avoided. Is not that gravy a little rich? If so, do not take it, my love. Keep your vegetables to the other side of the plate." "Sybil has to be so very particular," to host and hostess.

This from Lady Georgina.

Sybil's father would go yet further. "Sybil has such an uncommonly delicate stomach," would be distinctly caught in the Colonel's deep bass, supposed, but only supposed, to be lowered to an undertone. Oh, the rush of hot blood to Sybil's brow at the sound!

If only, only they would not talk about her, would not draw attention to her, would let her alone as other girls were let alone! She would avoid gravy, vegetables, everything—she would eat dry bread, if she might but eat it unobserved and uncommented upon.

How she would envy the healthy, hearty lads and lasses around her, country-bred

children, whose parents and guardians never troubled their heads as to what they ate, or drank, or wore—once it were on—who might tumble about on the ice, frolic in the snow, dance the long winter nights away, and toss among the haycocks on summer afternoons. Sybil was never allowed to run, or jump, or toss. She was not to be made too hot, nor too cold, nor too tired—and above all, she was never to be excited. Her cousins, when children, had been wont to shout aloud at their play. Sybil had once been heard to shout too. This had disturbed the Colonel and Lady Georgina for days afterwards.

To make one of the noisy, merry, riotous party of which Lady Diana was always the head and front, was the summit of bliss in the eyes of the solitary child. She would watch one and another of the little ones, as, fresh from their sports, they would run straight to their mother's lap, panting and glowing, spreading their mud-stained little hands upon her breast, kissing her with their hot, moist, merry lips, all unrepressed and unrebuked.

And yet, of course, *of course*, she could not doubt her parents' affection. It was only that Aunt Diana was different, and Aunt Diana seemed to understand. What delightful strong boots and woollen gloves Mary and Isabel wore, and what nice, rough, fashionable-looking coats they had! Poor Sybil's heart would be nearly broken as she compared those coats, and those plain, serviceable, unremarkable hats and frocks, with her own constructed, invented, unique articles of attire, every one of which had been designed on some strange unknown pattern for herself alone, and for whose every seam special and minute instructions had had to be given. Even her stockings were at all times woven to order; even those simple accoutrements could be turned into instruments of torture. It will scarcely be credited why, but the fact was this, that the poor little toes were severally encased as though in gloves.

Now this secret Sybil hoped and almost prayed was unknown beyond the precincts of her own home.

The distortion was not visible, not

visible ordinarily ; but the dread lest any unforeseen circumstance might lead to its detection was for many years one of the haunting terrors of the young girl's life. Little did either parent dream to what was due many an apparent readiness to comply with their wish to refuse an invitation, since not a syllable would be breathed in mortal ear of Sybil's inability to face the risk that lurked therein—since it would only need Lady Georgina's "Be sure that Miss Sybil changes her slippers," to open gulfs of possible misery.

Once the acute little ear, ever on the stretch, had caught a terrible opening sentence. "Sybil is a great sufferer from cold feet," delivered in the old Colonel's most impressive aside.

She had almost torn her playmates out of hearing. At every moment she had expected to hear the revelation, followed by all the self-complacent prolixity in which Colonel Latimer was wont to indulge when once upon his hobby-horse, and then—Sybil could not bear to think of what might have happened then. If

once Mary, or Isabel, or the boys knew!

Now the truth was that they did know, but pity sealed their lips. Pity sealed the lips of most people, when the pale-faced little girl was by. Who could bring the scarlet flush to that brow, and the quiver to that lip?

“The sweetest girl under heaven, Sir Robert.” It was Lady Diana who spoke. “The sweetest, truest, most loyal, lovable nature. How my sister and her husband —” Here the speaker choked indignantly and remembered herself. When in the vein, Lady Diana’s tongue was apt to run away with her. “Lady Georgina is, of course, entirely devoted to her daughter,” proceeded she presently, “but all the same she is cruel to her, cruel beyond everything. Oh, don’t look at me like that, Sir Robert. Bless me! I thought you knew what kind of cruelty I mean. Sybil’s parents worship the very ground she treads upon; but the ground must be carpeted, cushioned, padded, till she can neither see nor feel what she is doing.

She is perfectly conscious herself of this—and that is what I mean by Lady Georgina's being cruel. Sybil perceives everything incongruous and absurd in the mode of her upbringing. Her parents, on the other hand, perceive nothing, and will take advice from nobody. It is sufficient for them that some real or fancied want of Sybil's is supplied. They care not in the slightest whether or not public opinion is outraged by the manner in which it is done. My niece is not strong, not naturally strong, but she is by no means so delicate as they imagine, or as they have done their best to make her. She wants sunshine, warmth, freedom, merry-making, laughter. In her earlier days she wanted to romp, and shout, and tear about in the open air"—(the "open air" in Lady Diana's lips was to Sybil's parents as a red rag to a bull)—"now," proceeded the sensible and warm-hearted creature, "now that she is older, she wants to be let alone, to devise her own little projects, follow her own bent, and busy her hands and her brain in ways of her own choosing.

The poor child does not want to be set to do every single thing she does. It would be amusing, if it were not so absurd, to hear a great girl of seventeen, nearly eighteen now, directed and instructed, and questioned and cross-questioned, as to how every moment of her time is to be, or has been passed. If Sybil were a fool—but she is not by any means a fool! So far from it, I am persuaded that my niece has considerable force of character, and that all this grinding down and cramping in has not been able entirely to subdue it. She submits her will, but not without difficulty. And she is a finely strung child—well, scarcely a child now, but I must always think of her as one,—it is dreadful to her to have every little fancy held up to public view, and forced upon the attention of an audience. Sybil knows and sees what they are thinking, while her parents are entirely unconscious. My goodness! what scenes I have seen!” and Lady Diana turned up her eyes and raised her hands with the unction of a true orator. “Well, well,” proceeded she,



“well, well. Perhaps they will be wiser some day ; but I must say that the whole thing is a never-ceasing fret to me, and that the patience with which that dear child bears with my poor foolish sister and her still sillier husband—Colonel Latimer is the most obstinate man in existence, Sir Robert—I say that Sybil’s obedience and dutiful submission towards them, often brings the tears to my eyes.”

“You are a good woman,” said Sir Robert, who had listened to every word of the harangue. “You—you are a good woman.”

There was something in his tone which made Lady Diana look up. “Sybil is very pretty,” said she, softly.

“Very pretty.”

“And quite tall enough for so slight a figure.”

“Quite tall enough.”

“If she were only better dressed.”

Sir Robert smiled.

“I say, if she were only better dressed, Sir Robert ; but no doubt you think that is only a woman’s notion.”

“No, indeed, Lady Diana, I am sure that I—I agree with you ; but after all, you know, a frock is easily changed.”

“Sybil’s frocks are not.” The speaker laughed ; a laugh which had reference to some of the Colonel’s whispered revelations. “However,” she added, recollecting that she had something yet to say, “however, I understand your meaning. After all, dress is nothing—nothing. You are going to the birthday party, I believe ?”

He believed so too.

“Well, you will take Sybil in to dinner, I have very little doubt. You know she is to dine late”—Lady Diana, like the rest, attached a world of meaning to the simple fact—“Sybil is to dine late, and I understand is to be made a sort of queen of at the feast ; so, although her mother will have old Lord Furzecott, who could hardly be put off with a chit like Sybil, she will be taken in by the next in precedence, probably yourself.”

He bowed and looked—she was sure he looked—pleased.

“Do try to draw her out,” proceeded

Sybil's aunt, earnestly. "Make her talk. Make her answer for herself, for once. It is a real opportunity; for her parents cannot well answer in her place, and anticipate every syllable, from the two ends of the dinner-table. They would if they could," and she laughed afresh, "but luckily the table is long;—oh, but," and her face fell, "but I am afraid you will be placed at my sister's left hand. Oh, that would spoil all, for that poor old thing—Lord Furzecott, you know—he will only nod his head and mumble over his plate; he will require far, far too little attention, I fear. Well, you must do your best. Seize every chance. You will be repaid—indeed you will. Sir Robert, I love Sybil,"—which was a very good-natured thing to say on the part of a woman who had daughters of her own.

But, to be sure, Lady Diana was shrewd as well as kind. She had formed her own ideas on the subject; and she now told herself that neither Mary nor Isabella would ever need go a-begging, that young Dovercourt was nothing to them nor they

to him, and that, taking one thing with another, he was the very man for her niece.

Sybil would be happy with him, and he would be the making of her: the fond parents would never refuse such an offer, and so much could not with certainty be predicted of any other likely to come in their way.

“Good character, first-rate position, and close proximity,” nodded the excellent aunt to herself; “they will never have such another chance—never. It would break their hearts, poor things, to part with their ewe lamb; and to keep her near at hand they would give up a great deal—but there is really no one else at all suitable. As for Godfrey Hanbury”—and she turned up her nose as Lady Georgina had done, and looked equally handsome and haughty as she did so. “Sir Robert is poor, but his family is as good as our own; so some of the Latimer money may very well flow into the Dovercourt coffers. He is very nice—he is more, he is delightful—and so comfortably

stupid that they would all get on together like a house on fire. A brilliant man, even an ordinarily clever one, would never put up with Henry—never for a moment. But poor dear Sir Robert, with his round face and simple blue eyes—I think they rather lit up as he listened to me,” and she smiled to herself afresh—“I think I contrived to work an idea into his honest noddle. Now, if only those tiresome people—really, Henry and Georgina are such a pair of simpletons I am at the end of all patience with them—if only they will not go and do something ridiculous at this crisis, I think we shall achieve something. But they are such—it was with the utmost difficulty that I could prevail on them to allow Sybil to be handed in to dinner by the only man they would dream of for her husband! It was that lucky hit of suggesting that she might be made a sort of birthday queen of, that carried weight enough. Well, I have done my part, and now if only Sir Robert will do his!”

Sir Robert was ready enough to do his.

To him, as to the rest of the world, this “dining late” of Sybil Latimer’s meant the commencement of a new epoch, and as he had known her, off and on, from childhood, in a desultory, haphazard, come-and-go sort of fashion, it is not to be wondered at that he took an interest in the matter.

Had he been let to do so, he would soon have managed to be friends with Sybil. He had a talent for making friends, and, even as it was, she was less shy and more at her ease with him than with anybody beyond the precincts of Latimer Hall. His frankness, his hearty laugh, and his broad, red, beaming face had an infinite allure-ment for one who was never red-faced (except from blushes), and who did not know what it was to laugh aloud. Sir Robert would roar with merriment when thoroughly amused. He would lean back in his chair, and enjoy the joke to its very dregs; while poor Sybil, who could see funny things too, and would have had quite a little store of humour of her own if it had not been so persistently quelled, would look at him with an envy which, as

years passed, gradually gave way to admiration. How big, and bold, and brown he was! How little he cared which way the wind blew, or how hard the rain fell! How free he made with his tongue and his step within the muffled, hushed domain in which she herself had been taught to glide and murmur, until the very sound of a door shutting sharply or a footfall treading fearlessly would sometimes set her pulses in a flutter! Then how readily, and pleasantly, and altogether equably would Sir Robert chat with either parent, not as though he had a moment's hesitation about responding to their inquiries or combating their arguments!

Once or twice he had actually spoken up for her; he had dared to plead for an immunity against which even Lady Diana had not ventured to protest. He had not, it is true, been successful—no one ever would have been successful—but he had done it, and Sybil had almost adored him for doing it.

Grief and gratitude had mingled their bitter and sweet in her heart that night: grief

that her friend should have known of the rule which was to her so deep an indignity, and gratitude that he should have striven to right her wrong.

Thenceforth he had become her hero, and while Lady Georgina was saying to herself, in her supposed worldly wisdom, that it was of no use her and her husband's ever giving a thought to young Dovercourt, for that Sybil, dutiful and obedient as she was, would be certain to turn from his ugly face; and that, so surely as she did so, Henry would give in, and she herself would give in (seeing that Sybil's happiness was to them all in all)—while the poor creature, who, after all, was a mother and an affectionate one, was telling herself this with a sigh—what was Miss Sybil about, but wondering, and pondering, and peering out from under her long lashes to see what had become of this very Sir Robert, and questioning more and more whether he was in his turn ever giving a thought to her?

Once she had been nearly sure that he liked her, that he liked her better than



other people did, understood her more than they did—and—and—even admired her just a little, and looked at her just now and then ; but, for some months preceding the birthday party, the young man had been absent from the neighbourhood, and the news that he had not only been invited, but had accepted his invitation, gave her heart almost a shock. Then had followed the intimation that, at her aunt's suggestion (for the first time, Lady Diana's interference in a programme of their own had been graciously received by the prickly couple)—“at her aunt's suggestion ” had been repeated by both—it had been settled that she was to be taken in to dinner by the bachelor baronet.

Sybil had not said a word. But she had looked, as she had felt, happy : so happy, indeed, that Lady Georgina, ever on the watch for any change of colour or turn of feature, had suddenly paused, drawn a long breath, and gazed wistfully into her daughter's face. Did it strike her that the time had come when even that limpid surface might not reveal all that

lay in the depths beneath? At any rate the name of Sir Robert Dovercourt did not again rise to her lips, and presently she reverted to other matters connected with the all-important matter on hand. For such an august occasion Sybil was to have a really smart new dress. It could not, of course, be cut, as was the prevailing mode, low in the neck and short in the sleeve, and there must still be this and that hygienic precaution observed in the making; but still it was to be pretty, it was to be fashionable, and it was to be had from a first-rate London dressmaker. In this last lay the youthful *débutante's* chief source of satisfaction and comfort. No really first-rate potentate, such as Lady Georgina named, would, for her own sake, turn out a birthday dress for a young lady of eighteen that was not by means of art and skill worthy of her reputation. The tailors had, she knew, demurred to her coats, and had only been prevailed upon to yield on the plea that for a little girl, a mere school-room miss, appearance could not signify, health must be everything. Hints had,

however, been dropped that even in her parents' eyes appearance was now to a certain extent to be held of consequence, and Sybil trod on air. At last, *at last*, she was to be as others were, wear what they wore, and turn and step about without that terrible consciousness of being followed by curious and derisive glances, which had permeated her life hitherto. At last—perhaps, at last—one pair of eyes might look not only on her, but on her trappings, with all the ignorant but delightful homage of a man. Sir Robert, her old friend Sir Robert, should see that poor little Sybil could be “fine” for once.

How fast flew Sybil's feet up the broad oaken staircase when one bright frosty morning it was announced that the box—the box of boxes—had arrived from town! It had been taken to her dressing-room, she was informed, where it was already being opened; she waited to hear no more.

The lid was off, in spite of her haste, ere she was at the door, and the first sight that met her enraptured vision was that of

glossy folds of white satin festooned over with silvery veilings and wreaths and trails of shining blossoms, being drawn forth from rustling depths—a dream of beauty never to be forgotten.

Sybil stood still and clasped her hands. Never had she beheld anything more pure and exquisite—and it was to be for her, for *her*. A sigh of ecstasy escaped, a soft murmur burst from her parted lips. And then, to be sure, the fairy robe itself was not all. There were besides tiny, sparkling, beaded, white satin slippers, such slippers as Cinderella's prince might himself have fallen in love with; and there were a pair of the longest, softest, most delicately perfumed gloves, gloves that would certainly reach to Sybil's elbow, if not beyond; and best, because least expected of all—for Lady Georgina's orders had been lavish, but had for this occasion been entrusted to one person only—something still longer than the gloves, still softer, still more dainty; something that unrolled and unrolled, and grew more and more bewitching with every turn,

until finally resolved into the most beautifully embroidered silken stockings that heart of maiden could desire, with, oh ! joy of joys, no hidden horrors, no discomfiting secrets thereto attached. Her cup ran over. It seemed as if all at once every thorn had been extracted from her roses.

If the first view were ravishing, the next step was still more enchantingly novel and important. The whole contents of the box must be tried on without delay ; two attendants lent their aid ; Lady Georgina, eyeglass in hand, looked on ; and only the young lady's now acknowledged young-ladyhood prevented the worthy Colonel's being present also. As it was, he hung about in readiness to confer on any debatable point, or to pronounce upon the whole.

“ Are you sure they fit ? Do they *quite* fit ? ” earnestly demanded the mother, as the small feet in their wondrous new casings were displayed before her. “ Sybil, my precious, do not scruple to tell me exactly how they feel. Are they easy ? Are they comfortable ? Not too tight *anywhere* ?

Not too high in the heel, nor too low in the instep, nor too narrow across the toes? Do they pinch you in the *slightest*? Do they hurt *anywhere*? Say if they do at once, my love; they can be sent back, and fresh ones ordered if—”

“They are very nice indeed, thank you, mamma.” Sybil’s young face was aglow all over.

“They *look* very nice certainly, but still if they are not comfortable—”

“Indeed, mamma, they could not be more comfortable.”

“And the patience the bit thing has wi’ a’ her mamma’s fidgets and fancies, and her no bein satisfied with naethin, is a sicht to see,” cried old nurse, Scotch to the backbone, in her heart at this. “Puir bit cratur! she canna be *let be* e’en aboot a best goon for the birthday, but it maun be ‘Sybil, my bonnie, it’s bound to pinch ye some gait.’ Aweel, her mamma means nae ill, but the folks is few and far atween that could thole it!”

Sybil was now being arrayed in the satin folds.

“Charming!” cried Lady Georgina, for once caught in a womanly snare. “Charming!” and for a full minute she said nothing more.

But all too soon anxiety was at work again, and over and over again had it to be repeated that every detail was as it should be, that the waist was not too long, nor the collar too high, nor the sleeves too tight. Was the skirt at least not rather narrow? Could Sybil move, and breathe, and recline, at ease? Would she run no risk of tripping over her lace in front, or of being entangled in the train behind? Would those high-heeled slippers—But here Lady Georgina actually brought herself to a standstill, and dangled the eye-glass nervously from her hand. Now the truth was that “heels” were not only hers but Colonel Latimer’s inveterate and openly proclaimed aversion, and long and loudly had they waged war with them on Sybil’s behalf.

“Manacles, distortions, deformities,” had been the Colonel’s cry. Were it once to come to his knowledge that any living creature had dared to attach to the feet

of his precious child, or rather to her shoes, their obnoxious component part, speech would not have sufficed for his wrath, and no power on earth would have prevented his sending back the pretty, shining, sparkling little apples of discord, without the delay of an instant.

But Lady Georgina was not a man, nor a soldier. She looked at her daughter, and, as we have said, suggestion and inquiry alike melted away. She could not do it.

Of Sybil's own innocent delight, of her pride in displaying her small self so transformed and illumined to the sympathetic household, of the secret hopes to which the present hour gave rise within her modest bosom, fluttering and thrilling like that of a frightened bird beneath its unwonted sensations, we must not now pause to speak.

Suffice it to say that all went well, and the day of the dinner-party drew on.

Of this in itself the young girl had no dread. By nature Sybil was fond of society, easily pleased, readily amused, and disposed to believe that the most of



those she met were as kind, and good-humoured, and benevolent, as they appeared to be. People were always kind to *her*; and from having been so much in the company of her elders, the current topics of the day were neither found to be devoid of interest, nor above her comprehension; nor would she have shrunk from being questioned and appealed to, had she been allowed to reply without the reply being descanted upon, and dissected piece by piece. Might she but have talked as others talked—but why hark back to the old grievance? There was one person at least with whom Sybil Latimer was never miserable, never upon the tenter-hooks,—and with him—a sigh of satisfaction escaped whenever she thought of it—with him she was to pass the greater part of the eventful evening. Accordingly there only remained one subject for conjecture and anxiety now to feed upon, only one terror had still at times the power to keep sweet slumber from her eyelids. That haunting spectre was—a tumbler of milk.

Every evening at eight o'clock, when

Sybil sat down to make her usual light and easily digested supper during her parents' more solid and protracted meal, a tumbler of milk would be placed at her right hand, and it was one of the laws of the Medes and Persians in the old Colonel's household, that for no reason and under no circumstances was that tumbler of milk ever to be omitted. In his eyes the nutritious draught was the chief support, the very backbone as it were, of Sybil's fragile existence, and for this reason it had long been one of her worst enemies.

In vain had Lady Diana urged that milk, in conjunction with other food, was by no means the harmless and healthful diet he supposed. His hand had been raised on the instant, and his tone had been heightened also, as he had declaimed and expounded, with invariably the same result—incredulity and a shrug of the shoulders on her part, renewed and inflamed obstinacy on his.

In other respects the meal had been, after infinite deliberation and debate,

advanced with advancing years; so that, from the earlier plate of rusks and butter, it had now been turned into a minute helping of fish, with perhaps a potato in gravy to follow (neither soup nor meat was supposed to suit), but whatever there was or was not, the one thing needful, in the eyes of those who had not themselves to drink it, was the tumbler of milk, and the reason for its being so, with all the usual additional explanations and discussions, was given *con amore* to anybody present who inadvertently laid himself or herself open to receive them.

The point now was, would that ghostly tumbler appear to confront and overwhelm poor happy Sybil on this one glorious evening of her hitherto sunless life? She dared not inquire, had not the courage to awaken memories that might be dormant on the subject. The risk was too great.

Supposing, just supposing, that silence might mean a tacit consent to the absence just for once of the degrading relic of the nursery, would she not have herself to

thank, if by any ill-timed inquisitiveness she were to bring down evil on her own head? Provided a discreet reserve were maintained on the other hand, it was quite on the cards that Barlington—Barlington, who was the soul of propriety, and as severe an upholder of etiquette as his mistress herself—would take it upon himself to forget.

George and Thomas, the two underlings, would take their cue as in duty bound from their leader, and consider it impossible that anything so homely could appear at the gorgeous banquet. Could she but have hoped that her parents would have shared the feeling? Any such hope, however, at least with regard to the lynx-eyed Colonel, was vain as vain could be; it all depended on his not remembering and not perceiving. But what a thread to hang upon!

As the hour drew nearer the matter loomed more important. At first it had been one of many cares, an anxiety amid numerous anxieties,—but as these gradually subsided and as at length there remained

only the dreaded tumbler of milk and nothing besides, it attained a magnitude which not unnaturally dwarfed the lesser sources of gratification. Then came listening, watching, and straining to discover, if possible, whether or not anything had been said, any order given.

She did not think so. She could not find trace, or sign of its having been the theme of remark in any way. On the afternoon of the party, fortune favoured her yet the more; she was able to slip unperceived into the dining-room, all decked out and almost complete for the evening, and one hasty glance at the place which she knew had been prepared for herself, sufficed to show the now joyous and triumphant little maid that no tumbler of milk was expected there. Her glasses—one, two, three—were duly placed and arranged like those of other people. She asked no more. Oh, the joy of robing and trimming, of alternately dallying and hurrying over her toilette as eight o'clock approached! How early did Sybil repair

to her room, and how fondly did she stroke and smooth the satin, hold the trailing garlands up to view, peep at the fairy slippers, stretch and powder and uncover the many buttons of the long gloves! Ready long before she really need have been, there was every minute something to alter, to re-arrange, to improve. Now it was an ornament here, now a riband there, now a buckle to be adjusted, now a lock of hair to be fastened.

“Come, my love;” Lady Georgina herself at the door. “Come and enter the drawing-room with me, and—and—God bless you, my darling!” whispered the poor fond mother, with the water rising to her eyes. For once she had not a single fault to find.

For once Sybil neither shrank nor shrivelled beneath the eyes turned upon her as she walked up the great saloon. Sir Robert Dovercourt was already there—she was glad he was there. He looked at her—she was glad he should look. He spoke to her—and she was proud to be spoken to.

“Looks really well for once, does she not?” whispered Lady Diana, on the alert as ever; “looks as she ought to do, and not as she ever does do—or at least has done before. Now” (this was all to Sir Robert, who stood near), “now, you remember what I told you. Oh, don’t stand staring at Sybil, Sir Robert; we can all see that she is a new creature in that nice new dress,—but have your wits about you. Don’t allow this chance to pass. Listen; if you find that your partner is to sit close to either parent, just get into a wrong place, and don’t be got out of it.”

Sir Robert’s honest face flushed up with humour and comprehension. She saw she could depend upon him.

Then the move to the dining-room began, and he made for Sybil’s side. “I am to have you to myself, Sybil. That is jolly.”

“Oh, yes;” quite ready to assent.

“Did you know before me?”

“Oh, yes.” Sybil always spoke the simple truth.

“How did you know?” proceeded he, however. “You had no business to know. Now, supposing you had wanted to have some one else?”

“Well?”

“You would have made your mother throw me over.”

“Oh, no,” said Sybil earnestly.

“Oh, yes, you would.”

“Indeed I should not; I never should have thought of doing so.”

“Why not?”

“Why, I never ask mamma *anything*,” and the house of cards on which he had begun to build fell over on the instant.

“Oh,” said Sir Robert, showing in his tone something of this; “oh, I had hoped—but no matter. I see how it is. Your mother arranged it all, and you had no voice. Girls do have a voice in such matters sometimes, don’t they?” He sighed, and shot a side-glance. At the same moment his well-tutored eyes discerned that if his place were on the left hand of Lady Georgina, at least he was



not obliged to know as much. The places were not named.

“I think we might sit here;” and the sturdy baronet seized the back of a chair almost in the middle of the table. “Eh? What?” as a footman officiously hurried forward to correct the mistake. “Eh? Oh, we shall do very well here. No, never mind; we’ll stop where we are, thank you,” in decided accents, and Lady Diana’s laughing eyes applauded the speaker from the opposite side.

“Delightful!” thought Sybil, “delightful!” “Now,” pondered she presently, “now I am quite safe, even from the tumbler of milk. Papa cannot see me at all, and mamma is not likely to be watching. If mamma were but in her place—” And the next moment Lady Georgina was in her place.

A momentary hesitation, a disturbed glance as she beheld what had happened, but that was all. Lady Georgina Latimer was far too well-mannered a woman to cause a scuffle at her own board and among her own guests; there had been a

blunder, but she could not help it; if young Dovercourt had been stupid enough to mistake his instructions, he must take the consequences; he had been told where he was to go, and he ought to have done as he was bid; she could not pull about her dinner-table in order to give him his proper precedence, and so he must be shown; he must now sit where he was, and he would know better another time.

Apparently Sir Robert was content in his disgrace. His broad, red, healthy, jolly face had never looked more replete with satisfaction and good-humour. It was an ugly face—an ugly face according to commonly accepted canons—but somehow it was one that everybody liked, and that no one was ever sorry to see. More than one among the ladies present would cheerfully have exchanged the elegant, faultlessly attired youth at her side for Sybil's rough-and-ready partner, who was too much of a man, and too big a man altogether, to give his clothes, or his manners, or himself in any way, very much of his attention, and had in consequence the

whole of it to bestow on his companion. It was well known that Sir Robert could afford to defy even Lady Georgina. Lucky Sybil !

Now Sybil felt her luck to the very bottom of her young heart. She was, it is true, almost a child, but she was almost a woman also.

The birthday party in itself, with all its attendant joys and immunities, would have satisfied the one half of her nature, but it was the other half which now experienced a keener, sweeter pleasure. A woman's hopes and fears and flutterings were beginning to stir within her breast, and she was conscious of an emotion other than she had ever known, and one before which all else paled and faded. Formerly a kind word, or look, or merry confidence from her old friend had almost certainly been evoked by painful circumstances, or had been followed by some embittering element. Even on the few occasions when it had not been so, when all had gone well, it had struck keenly home to the child's lonely heart that he, who was so much to her

probably scarce yielded more than a passing friendliness, a sort of compassionate goodwill, in return. Of late, to be sure, Sir Robert had seemed to care a little more, to seek her out a little more,—but never, never in his life had he looked at her as he did now. And as for his talking to any one else! Certainly he had on his other side the dullest dame in the county, and one whom even he could not awaken nor invigorate. But still he should have tried, surely he should have tried. Surely the poor lady should not have been allowed to wade through course after course with only the most perfunctory and interjectionary and spasmodic of observations from the gentlemen on either side of her. As a rule she could have depended on Sir Robert Dovercourt, who had the character of being the kindest-hearted and least discriminating talker in the world—a young fellow so happy in himself that he brimmed over here, there, and everywhere, regardless on whom the sunbeams fell. Was it possible that even Sir Robert could fail for once?”

Sir Robert actually did. There he sat,

talking, laughing, eating, telling good stories, cracking good jokes, and sipping good wine, the merriest of the merry, but with ne'er a thought of duty nor of conscience. Poor woman, she never quite forgave him. And she never but believed to her dying day that Sybil cast a glamour then and there over the simple young man, who otherwise would have no more given his heart—. But we anticipate.

Let us return to the tumbler of milk. It was, as we have said, absent, and, in Sybil's eyes, conspicuous by its absence, even from the place which should have been hers. She felt now doubly secure. There was no chance of Lady Georgina's being reminded, nor of Colonel Latimer's reminding himself. The dinner was in full swing, and both were—must be fully engrossed. She need no longer dread her dream of bliss being rudely broken in upon. She might give herself up to it unchecked, play the woman. She would, indeed, content her appetite with a mere thimbleful of the delicious soup (Sybil was fond of soup), whose irrepressible odour

issuing from the distant kitchen had assailed her nostrils throughout the day; she would also be on her honour in regard to the fish, decline the sauce, and avert her eyes from the tempting entrées. All of this was nothing; to refrain from every delicacy in or out of season was nothing (indeed, she had of her own accord promised as much in rehearsal, overjoyed to do so, and thus foresee an exemption from outward reminders);—but now even desire to feast upon forbidden fruit was at an end, subdued by an all-powerful rival. Sir Robert could eat and drink and make love all at once—for Sybil it was enough only to receive the last. She asked no more.

“All due to me,” chuckled Lady Diana, from her vantage-ground opposite; “all due to my poking up that dear, nice, stupid fellow, who is the very man for Sybil, but would have no more had the wit to find it out for himself than to fly. Now he will go ahead as though he were in the hunting-field. He will never stop till he has run her in, as he would say.

Oh, yes, I can see you doing it, Sir Robert ; you have started now, and are well off I should imagine, by your looks—and hers. Poor child, what a good time she is having ! But what is the matter ? What are the people looking at ? What is Sybil crimsoning at ? Some folly of my senseless prig of a brother-in-law, I'll answer for it. Oh, but that is really *too* bad," and, in spite of her indignation, the lively lady gave way to mirth she could not restrain. " Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! " for Lady Diana had an acute sense of the ludicrous. " Oh, poor Sybil, poor Sybil ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! And, oh, dear ! Sir Robert's face ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! And, oh my goodness ! what is Sybil going to do ? Oh, that incurable idiot, Barlington, to go and present poor Sybil before us all with a great, horrid, invalidish tumbler of milk ! "

Well might she say, " What is Sybil going to do ? " Poor Sybil. One moment before, and she had never been so happy in her life. In her fancied security she had been prattling, and jesting, and drinking in the exquisite draught of ardour uncon-

cealed, with which Sir Robert's eyes and tongue at once presented her, bending her fair neck the better to give ear to the voice of the enchanter, expanding like a flower in the warmth, responding to the sunshine. And now! It was only a tumbler of milk, but with it the serpent entered into Sybil Latimer's paradise.

That the blow should have fallen thus ! That she should have been struck down just when she was treading the celestial heights, when she was inhaling the intoxicating incense, being lured to rapture by the bewitching music!—when, and oh, reader, deign to think this pitiful, and deign to pity—when she was at last free, unfettered, untortured, and at peace !

No word did Sybil speak. Words would have availed nothing ; protests, entreaties, rebellion itself even, would now have been all too late ; the deed had been done, the sight had been seen, the disgrace was ineffaceable.

Full in the view of all, and uncomely even in the eyes of him who bore it, there was the large white tumbler on its shining



tray, and in the accompanying sentence, "By master's orders, miss," the hapless victim read her doom afresh.

It happened, moreover, that at the moment a silence fell upon the company, so that her own pale consternation, Sir Robert's mute, round-eyed amazement, and Lady Diana's "My goodness!" were lost upon nobody, and indeed directed to the one point the looks and intelligence of such as might otherwise have been engaged.

"There is your milk, Sybil."

Like a dim echo came her father's voice from the bottom of the table. Sybil almost shuddered.

"There is your milk," repeated he; and then, horror of horrors, she heard, she was sure she heard, the "Sybil suffers so much from &c., &c.," which was the inevitable prelude to revelations and confidences. Of all things Colonel Latimer piqued himself upon being a judicious and thoughtful parent; the present opportunity for proving himself to be one had been too much for him, and his "Miss Latimer's milk" had

been delivered in a tone that had admitted of no remonstrance. He was now explaining his theory on the subject to the matrons on either side.

But Sybil, what befell her? How did she comport herself? How did she endure the luckless moment?

“Milk, by Jove!” cried a laughing voice in her ear. “Milk, I declare! Is it for you, Sybil? Is that your fancy?” (Her fancy, poor child!) “Well, upon my word, it is a splendid idea,” pursued Sir Robert, talking comfortably away; “looks jolly, and tastes first-rate, I’ll answer for it. I never heard of anybody’s taking milk at dinner before. I am sure I don’t know why they shouldn’t though, if they like it; I daresay it tastes uncommonly nice; I—” But here the good-humoured young voice suddenly died away, the blue eyes dropped, and over the speaker’s frank open face a queer look stole. “By Jove!” he might have been heard to whisper to himself beneath his breath. For all down Sybil’s scarlet cheeks the tears were streaming.

Of course she should have helped it ; of course you and I would have helped it ; we would have sunk into the earth, given up the ghost upon the spot, rather than have committed such a terrible, irremediable offence against *les convenances* ; but perhaps, on the other hand, we have not had our spirit subdued and our strength broken by years of tutelage amounting to martyrdom, and we have not been, as it were, caught, and caged, and thrust back into our prison again, just when we had spread our wings in one rapturous first flight beyond. This was what had happened to my poor little heroine, and beneath the stroke she sank her head and wept.

“ Oh, my goodness ! my goodness ! my goodness ! ” Lady Diana’s laugh from very horror froze upon her lips. She was no great hand at propriety herself, but this went altogether beyond her. “ Oh, my goodness ! that child has done for herself now, at all events, ” muttered she, as grave as a judge. “ Who would have believed Sybil did not know better ? Well, my good sister and brother, you have

only yourselves to thank for this. I hope you like it. All I can say is, I am thankful it is no child of mine who is making such an exhibition of herself. It will be the talk of the neighbourhood, and every one will say they have weakened the girl's intellect with their folly. Oh, Sybil, for goodness' sake stop!" continued she, almost aloud. "It is *too* dreadful, and Sir Robert—" But she raised her eyes at the moment, and forgot to finish the sentence. Sir Robert had taken possession of the milk.

"Sybil?" No answer. "Sybil," said he again. A low sob. Then a faint "Yes?"

"You do not want this, and I do," pursued the speaker, softly; "let me keep it;" for she had put out her hand. "I want to take it from you, I want your leave to drink it for you; but"—(every one else was now talking very fast, and Lady Diana's voice rose above the rest in her gayest, liveliest accents)—"but" continued the young man, drooping his own tones lower and lower till even the one ear

for which they were designed could scarcely catch them, "but it would be too great an honour; I have no right to ask it, I have no claim to put myself forward as your knight, unless"—(the talking around was still loud, fast, and furious)—"unless," murmured Sybil's companion very low, "you will yourself give me the right. Sybil, dear Sybil! may I do this, and everything else for you from this time? May I—," and he stopped, and held the glass of milk in his hand, gazing into her face. "Do you understand?" he said.

Understand? Her very heart was bursting.

"I want to fight all your battles for you, to take all your troubles on my shoulders; to care for you, and have you for my own," fumbled good Sir Robert, not knowing very well in what words to put the feeling with which his great chest was heaving, but no whit reluctant nor embarrassed neither. "Only say one word, won't you? Because, you see, I must have one word, or else—Oh, then, never

mind about it," for the chances of obtaining what he sought were obviously small, and it became prudent not to press the point. "No, never mind," he went on, "I ought not to have spoken now, only—only that I can't help it. And if you will just—I say, I may drink it, may I? No, don't look up and down the table; neither your father nor your mother has anything to do with this, no one has anything to do with this, except *you, you, you* yourself. You, and only you must give me my answer, Sybil. I won't take it from any one else. I only ask for a sign, or a look. I shall know what you mean, and you will know what I mean. It is between ourselves. But if I am allowed to drink this—am I to be allowed? . . . Sybil?" . . . Again he paused, and there was no evading nor mistaking that pause.

"Sybil?" Her head bent lower. "Is it to be 'Yes'?" he whispered.

"Yes."

Sir Robert raised his face, and fronted the assembled guests triumphantly.

"Something has happened," cried Lady

Diana to herself. "Something has surely happened. He's in earnest. I swear he is in earnest. He has got that wretched milk in his hand, and—good heavens! he looks as though he were going to drink it!"

He drank it to the last drop.

"And now," he cried exultingly; "and now?"

She had no words, but neither did he need them. One moment his hand sought hers beneath the table, and he knew that henceforth she would refuse him nothing. . . .

And Sir Robert maintained afterwards, and maintains to this day, that it was the tumbler of milk that did it all.

"For, by Jove! I had always thought Sybil was an uncommonly nice girl, you know," he averred joyously; "and I was struck all of a heap by her when she came in that evening, all dressed out so beautifully, you know. But then, that was one thing, and falling in love was another, you know. I don't know—mind you, I only say I don't *know* that I had exactly thought

about falling in love with Sybil just then. Of course I should have done it sooner or later ; I couldn't have helped myself ; but if it had not been for that tumbler of milk—by Jove ! I am glad I have not to drink such beastly stuff every day,—though to be sure I did not grudge drinking it, and I would do it again for Sybil any time—of course I would. Only I hope to goodness never to see poor Sybil in such a plight again. I can hardly think of it now. I felt as if I could have murdered somebody. That poor child ! But I tell you what, she is never going to cry any more, she has promised me that. Bless you, she is as happy as the day is long, now. And she tells me everything, that she does. I know how to get it out of her in spite of all her saying, ' I am afraid I ought not to tell you,' and that sort of thing. That is all nonsense. If I am to be her husband, I shall have to hear it some time, so I may as well begin at once. 'Tis as good as a play. I know all about the coddling and the fussing, and the queer coats and hats, and the old nurse sitting up in the next



room till after she is asleep at night,—oh, by Jove, the whole thing is delicious. Take care of her? Of course I'll take care of her, but it will be in another way, mind you. It shan't be by making her blush up before everybody, and nipping her in the bud at every turn. It shan't be by treating her like something between a fool and a baby. I know what I'm about. Why, Sybil is a new creature already, and as for her parents—" He gulped down the comment in his throat. "Oh, it's all right, of course," he concluded cheerfully; "they are very good sort of people, and we shall get on first-rate. I bear them no grudge, nor yet does Sybil, for that—that—that tumbler of milk."

## ONE QUIET DAY.



“ My poor exhausted friend, you write,  
The season’s ding-dong at its height,  
You’re ‘ nearly done for, if not quite ;’—

I’m here to say  
Come down to us, and spend the night  
And one long day.

Give up for once the early call,  
The long, long dinner, late, late ball ;  
The ‘ private view ’ and ‘ first-night ’ stall ;

Park lounge and band ;  
State festival in courtly hall,  
Gay four-in-hand.

The dress, dress, dress, from morn till  
night ;

The talk, talk, talk, from dark till light  
The toil, the hurry, and the fright

(Most potent spur)  
Of being absent from the sight,  
Where others were.

Put by for once St. James's airs,  
The eyeglass, and the freezing stares,  
The suit, just fit for easy-chairs,  
Two fingers numb ;  
Be as you were in other years.  
Old fellow, come. . . .

What? you have 'long engagements  
made?  
Notes to be written—visits paid?  
Business that cannot be delayed'?  
Not really? What?  
Your 'friends would miss you,' you're  
afraid?—  
Why should they not?

You say you'd like our quiet yews,  
Our grassy meadows where the dews  
So quickly melt, that you could snooze  
All day i' the sun ;  
But as it is, you 'must refuse,'—  
'It can't be done.'

You say you're weary of the fray,  
Your ears are sickened of the bray  
Of endless jubilee. Hooray!  
Now do come down.

O ! you ‘ don’t really see your way  
To leaving town ’ ?

Well, Charley boy, I will not press ;  
It only bores you. I confess  
I thought you’d leave that seething mess  
For just *one* day.  
I see it’s hopeless. Well, God bless  
You, anyway !”

# ARABELLA AT THE SALES.

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## SCENE I.

Old-fashioned rectory within the London radius. Hot July day. The Rev. CHARLES FAIRLOP, stout, leisurely, peaceable, orthodox parson; his daughter SOPHIA, sensible girl of nineteen; and his sister ARABELLA, flighty damsel of fifty, are gathered beneath the shade of their broad cedar-tree, letters and newspapers in their hands.

ARABELLA (with vivacity). “Yes, yes, here they are, here they are, every one of them. ‘Summer Clearance Sales’ all over the page. Marshall and Snelgrove, Debenham and Freebody, Harvey and Nicholls, Swan and Edgar, Gask and Gask, Peter Robinson—Whiteley, of course.

Oh ! and here are even Howell and James, Russell and Allen, Lewis and Allenby, Redmayne—”

RECTOR (looking mildly round). “ What are you talking about, Arabella ? What are all those names ? ”

ARABELLA. “ So like a man, is it not, Sophia ? He does not even know that these are *the* shops of London. He will say he has never either seen or heard of them ! ”

RECTOR. “ I suppose I have heard of them ; I may have seen them ; but I cannot imagine what either you or I have now to do with them. You do not want anything. ”

ARABELLA (throws up her hands). “ Not want anything ! My dear brother, here have I been waiting, waiting for these July sales to be on— I cannot tell you how long I have been waiting ! Going without a waterproof all through the cold, rainy spring weather, and making my old parasol last on throughout the sunniest months, though it is so thin and worn, and in so many holes that it scarcely affords me the slightest protection ! That is only a simple instance. I want dozens of odds and ends

that I cannot think of all at once. And—and Sophia wants a light dress, and Jane has been asking for new tablecloths, and John 'Thomas has broken hishoe.” (SOPHIA laughs, and is pounced upon.) “Laugh if you please, but I know what I am about; I know how to take advantage of an opportunity: I think for the future. These sales are—”

RECTOR. “All very well in their way, my dear, but—”

ARABELLA (excitedly). “The bargains one picks up are beyond everything. My cousin Maria bought last year a dozen yards of lace flouncing for as many shillings, and half a dozen remnants of sash ribbon for nearly as few pence. Ball shoes she only gave one-and-ninepence for—”

SOPHIA. “What did Maria want with ball shoes?”

ARABELLA. “It would have been a sin and shame to let them go. And as for the flouncing, it will last her for years.”

SOPHIA. “It will, for she will never use it.”

ARABELLA (peevishly). "How you do lie at the catch! I heard you yourself say you meant to buy your new light dress at the after-season sales."

SOPHIA. "My dear aunt, so I shall. I hope to get one for a good deal less than I should at another time, but—" (pauses to look at her father).

RECTOR (puts his rather heavy foot in it all unconsciously). "Aye, aye, trust my Sophia. She will get just what she needs, no more and no less."

ARABELLA (colouring up). "But I am not to be trusted. Upon my word I did not expect—" (Rambles on for some time, while father and daughter unite in peacemaking, and signify to one another that they must give way about the sales.)

ARABELLA (restored to good-humour). "So you really thought I should be run away with? Well, at my age—but, to be sure, I always was young, and I suppose I always shall be. The staid Sophia must keep me within bounds to-morrow; I promise to listen, provided only she does not say 'No' to everything. Sophia has



rather a way of saying ‘No’; throwing a dash of cold water over one, just when one is about to make a hit; and I am by no means sure that she is always as wise as she thinks. However, I know she is quite of my mind about these sales, and we shall only buy the very cheapest things at each place. Where shall we begin? Shall we go first to the north or the south side of the park? Shall we take the underground, or the omnibus? Sloane Square for Harvey and Nicholls, or the Royal Oak for Whiteley’s. See, Charles, how methodical I can be; I know the best way to each place; I—”

RECTOR (drily). “I have not the slightest doubt, my dear Arabella, of your finding the direct route to every snare; I am bound to allow that you have always shown that the bent of your genius lies in that direction. No one can say that the net of the fowler has ever been spread in vain for you. No, no, my dear sister; my only fear is, that, once in the trap, once inside—”

ARABELLA. “Once inside, I am at home everywhere. Even in the labyrinths of

Whiteley's, with the 'seven shops through' and 'Queen's Road department' being dinned into my ears on every side, I am never at a loss—"

SOPHIA (aside). "Papa, it is of no use, she cannot understand. Just let her go."

RECTOR (shrugs his shoulders). "Let her go? Cart-ropes would not keep her back. And she will toil, and strain, and struggle to the front of every counter, pant up every staircase, squeeze through every doorway—"

SOPHIA (smiling). "And examine the reduction of every ticketed article within her reach. But she has set her heart on going, so please order the chaise for an early train, that we may have the whole day for this weary pilgrimage. I will do my best to get through it without too much loss of money, time, and temper."

RECTOR (alone). "My daughter's sweetness almost reconciles me to my sister's simplicity, and her wisdom compensates for Arabella's folly."

## SCENE II.

London. MISS FAIRLOP and her niece, plainly attired in washing dresses, black-beaded mantillas, and serviceable bonnets, emerge from an East-end omnibus, holding large bags in their hands.

SOPHIA (presently). “Is there really any need for our going to more places now? We have been to so many, and seen the same things everywhere. Everywhere the same piles of parasols and umbrellas, the same cascades of fur trimmings and boas, the same vast *plateaux* of artificial flowers, rainbows of ribbons, waggon-loads of green wicker-work, and hecatombs of fans, sachets, handkerchiefs, shawls and cloaks. You have already bought more—(chokes down the word “trumpery”) than you know what to do with, and—”

MISS F. (complacently). “Very true;

we have done a great deal. We have had a most successful expedition. Such bargains! But it would be a pity not to go to all. I am laying in a perfect stock of winter usefuls; that fur edging, even though it is a little thin and shabby in some places, will make my old velvet cloak quite smart again; and if, as you say, I shall not actually use the jet tassels for the same cloak, I shall be just as glad of them for something else. They are the handsomest tassels I have seen anywhere; and it occurred to me, all in a moment, what a saving it would be to have them by one, recollecting what a price Miss Snippets always charges for jet of any kind. You see, my dear niece, I think of these things; it is natural that I should think more than you do—”

SOPHIA. “This is not the best door to enter at.”

MISS F. “Is it not? But one door is surely as good as another—and there do seem to be such pretty things laid out on this counter. Oh, we must come in here, Sophia, or we may never find the

place again. We can easily work round to the other entrance." (Prepares to stem the torrent within.)

SOPHIA (from behind). "This way, aunt, this way."

MISS F. gets gradually urged on out of sight. At length is overtaken in a comparatively empty department, helplessly gazing around, and replying at random to all the demands made upon her. At the sight of her niece she revives, and starts afresh. "My dear Sophia, where have you been? But no doubt, you, like me, are bewildered, and scarcely know what you want, and what you do not want."

SOPHIA (aside, with a sigh). "Oh, I know very well—both the one and the other."

MISS F. (in a supposed undertone). "You see, I have really not so very much money left. Not that I am in the least sorry for it, for I am delighted with every single purchase I have made. The dressing slippers, with a pair of cork soles inside, will fit me perfectly, and even if the stockings do not stand very rough

wear, that can hardly be expected of them, considering that they cost next to nothing. I have already two different plans in my head for disposing of that worsted-work border, and though you tried to dissuade me from taking the whole of that strip of window blind, it is the very thing my cousin Maria is sure to want directly she sees it, and she will take any I have over. As for the Swiss embroidery, it always comes in; and though I have no immediate need of gloves, it would have been foolish to let those very cheap ones go. Gloves will *always* come in. Those pretty neckties, only fourpence three-farthings each, I shall give the maids. They will never guess how little they cost."

SOPHIA. "Why not? They have only to come to the sales like ourselves."

MISS F. "To be sure, that is true. Well, the ties must find other recipients then; I could not pass them over. Those carriage-blankets were really marvellous, Sophia; I must speak to your papa first, but I hope he will send for one at once."

SOPHIA. "What in the world should we do with a smart embroidered carriage-blanket on our poor old chaise?"

MISS F. "They were going such bargains. But, however—" (Enters a doorway, turning her head from side to side, and proceeding to investigate articles of every description as she slowly moves forward.) "Now, Sophia, for your summer dress. Sophia, Sophia, wait one moment; you go on so fast; do look at these evening wraps—I call them extremely pretty; and this dark red—"

SOPHIA (gently urging her aunt forward). "Very pretty. The costume department is upstairs."

MISS F. (coming to a standstill). "I have a great mind to have some of that fringe. Fringe is usually such a price, and this mantle—"

SOPHIA (persuasively). "Yes, but you can think how much of it would be required while we are upstairs."

MISS F. "To be sure, yes. What a pretty work-bag. My work-bag is quite worn out."

SOPHIA (hastily). "Those are nice table-covers half-way up the stairs."

MISS F. "Where? Where?"

SOPHIA. "In front." (Aside.) "Thank heavens we are here at last. The only place I really wished to come to, and I should thankfully have given it up to have got away." (Looks at reduced summer dresses). "My dear aunt, do sit down and rest."

MISS F. (sinks wearily into a chair), "How tired I am!" (Suddenly rises, and darts forward to where another customer is having costumes spread before her). "Please allow me to see that one. It is just the sort of gown I require. How much? Six guineas? Six guineas reduced? Oh!" (Returns to her seat somewhat daunted. After another minute's pause, darts forward again). "*How* much did you say those tulle skirts were? Five shillings? *Five shillings!* Why, Sophia, Sophia—" (Repeats the price, meantime turning over in her hand a faded and soiled ball skirt, which has been reduced to the above sum).



SOPHIA (in a low voice). "My dear aunt, I would not be seen in such a thing."

MISS F. "But, my dear, the price."

SOPHIA. What does the price matter if I could not wear it? It would simply be five shillings thrown away."

MISS F. "Well, it is not as fresh as—perhaps you are right. Now, what have you chosen? Oh, already? But, my dear, do not be in too great a hurry. Look at this, and this, and this—" (Going from one to another. Meantime, SOPHIA gives her address, and pays for her purchase). "Ready so soon? And you have actually bought it? Well, now for downstairs again. I saw some luggage-straps on my way up, and the holidays will soon be here."

SOPHIA. "But we are not going away."

MISS F. We *may* go. It is well to be prepared."

SOPHIA. "The other door, aunt. It will take us into Oxford Street." (Succeeds in gradually beguiling her aunt towards it, and across the threshold; but

MISS FAIRLOP comes to a dead stop before the window).

MISS F. "Those curtains, my dear. Your father's study. Really it does need new curtains."

SOPHIA. "Even if it does, we have no measurements."

MISS F. "True. Well, I must measure when we go home. But that small rug, there is no measurement required for it. So pretty, and so cheap. It would really be a pity not to—" (Re-enters the shop, and buys the rug).

MISS F. (in renewed spirits). "Now for the other side of the Park, though to be sure, I have not much money left. Still, we may as well just have a look."

SOPHIA (archly). "And get your waterproof."

MISS F. "My waterproof? I am afraid I shall have to give that up. It must wait for another year, or I can get it at Christmas. Sales are on again then, you know. After all, in such weather as this one should not be thinking of waterproofs."

## SCENE III.

The RECTOR's study. Round the open windows the westeria and dark red trumpet-blossoms cluster thickly; while the luscious scent of the magnolia makes all the warm air heavy within. Every now and then a large moth dashes wildly in, and beats itself against the glass of the solitary lamp, or is heard rustling up and down in the curtained corner of the ceiling. Bats flip past in the dusk. MR. FAIRLOP, extended luxuriously on the much-worn ample couch, fans himself with his pocket-handkerchief, and soliloquises half aloud.

RECTOR. "What a day to have been fagging and sweating in town! The very birds are silent from the heat, and even the setting of the sun seems to bring with it no coolness, so far. Yet we are well off, as folks go. It is something to have stillness and shade in July; something not to

have to walk about over frizzling pavements, and among melting humanity. How thankful I am to have this quiet old semi-country place to live in ! It is at least out of the glare and fever of London, if it is not quite among the bean-fields. The flowers thrive too ; and we can lead a rational life—if Arabella would only let us. What a time she is in coming ! That poor child of mine—” (Takes out his gold repeater watch, and consults it. The door-bell rings at the moment, and presently in come the absentees.)

ARABELLA (triumphantly). “Here we are, here we are. Well, you do look comfortable, and as if you had lain there all day ; while we—Oh, my dear Charles, such a day as we have had ! Such heat, such noise, such a Babel of voices, such crowding, such cramming, such a fuss to get a thing before it is snapped up by somebody else, such a Napoleonic expedition altogether !”

RECTOR (rather gravely). “You have bought a great deal then ?”

ARABELLA. “Indeed we have. Every

sort of thing. Garments great and small, parasols, bags, bonnets, handkerchiefs, knickknacks—”

RECTOR (raising his hand somewhat peremptorily). “Not quite so loud, my dear. You must try—ahem—to moderate your voice a little. I have something to say; something has happened—I have had some bad news.” (Stops, and looks at his daughter, who looks anxiously at him in return.)

ARABELLA (excitedly). “Bad news! How? What? From whom?”

RECTOR. “Of course we half expected it. We knew when they were married that his health was in a precarious state.”

ARABELLA, incoherently. “*They? Who? They were married? Who were married? His health? Whose health?*”

RECTOR, (frowning, and looking annoyed). “I am telling you all that I know myself—at least I am telling you, as well as you will let me.”

ARABELLA (dropping parcels all round in the endeavour to hold up her hands). “*I let you! My dear brother—*”

RECTOR (pacifically). "Well, well. All I mean is that I know no more than the bare fact. Poor Susan's husband—"

ARABELLA. "Dear me!" (Pauses.) "But still it is only in India. I am very sorry; but—"

RECTOR. "As I merely saw it in the papers, there is still some hope that I may be mistaken."

ARABELLA. "Mistaken? Oh dear, no. People never are mistaken that way. You may depend upon it you were in the right. Well, I am really grieved—poor Susan—and the worst of it is that Jay's was the one and only place we did not go near to day. It never entered into my head to think of any one's dying, and of course I was not so foolish as to spend my money on mourning, without knowing for whom it might be wanted. Not one single, solitary black thing did I buy." (Leaves the room.)

RECTOR. "She is utterly heartless."

SOPHIA. "No, papa, not that; only so much taken up by the one thought that she has no room left for any other. These

sales—" (RECTOR curbs an unclerical exclamation). "She will be quieter to-morrow, and able to show her better self."

The morrow comes. RECTOR enters the ladies'-room with a cheerful step.

RECTOR. "All right! I was mistaken, and I am most heartily rejoiced at it. These newspaper telegrams are a perfect nuisance, and one never knows what they really mean. It was another Mr. Smith altogether. So now, Arabella, I suppose you will congratulate yourself that you did not go to Jay's—or whatever the name is—and be able to enjoy your purchases."

ARABELLA (looking rather foolish). "Dear me, brother, I wish I had known earlier, for you gave me such a fright that I—"

RECTOR. "That you—well?"

ARABELLA. "I sold the whole pack to Lady Clipshift, half-price, this morning."

RECTOR. "This morning!"

SOPHIA. "Half-price!"

ARABELLA (recovering herself). "Half-price, taking one thing with another. She

would not have some without all—I told her how matters lay—we roughly reckoned up the whole, and she very kindly agreed to take it off my hands. John Thomas carried round the parcel the first thing after I returned home, for, you know, Sophia, it *might* have been a pity if Lady Clipshift had changed her mind. So I gave her no time to do that. I had her payment for everything down in cash; and uncommonly lucky I thought myself, to get off so cheap.”

SOPHIA. “The purchases you made only yesterday!”

ARABELLA. “It is no matter. The sales are still on. I do not regret a single thing; for successful as we were yesterday, I feel quite convinced that we shall be still more successful—to-morrow.”



# LADY NELLY.

## A MISINTERPRETATION.



“I MET your carriage going to the village, Mrs. Hayward, and thought you had chosen rather a dreary day for a drive—five or six inches of snow on the ground. But I see you are better off. Who were the adventurous people then?” continued the speaker, looking round a large comfortable drawing-room. “Every one seems here.”

“The carriage was empty. It was going to the station for my niece, Lady Helen Mortimer, who arrives from town by the five o’clock express,” was the reply, and being made with some distinctness it was heard by all, and produced a sensation, curious and varying, in the breasts of several present. Had the same thing been said, or, to be more exact, had the same

fact been stated a few brief weeks before, neither start, nor smile, nor significant glance, nor undertoned aside, would, we may safely assert, have been provoked by it. One person, for instance, would not have suddenly risen and walked to the window; another would not have held his little, broad, fat seven-year-old sides, and shaken with laughter; while two more with obviously contrary emotions would not have begun a low muttering commentary into each other's ears.

"Lady Helen Mortimer! Do hear mamma!" cried Amabel Hayward under her breath. "Poor little Nelly! And so the big carriage has gone for her, though she has never in her life had anything better than the dog-cart or the old pony-chaise sent before! I do wish mamma would not make us all absurd."

"We could hardly have sent anything open on a day like this," rejoined her sister to whom the above had been confided, for the two were bending over a piece of embroidery; "but I own I do hope mamma is not going to give little Nelly her new

title at every turn, in season and out of season. As you say, it would make us absurd, and no one would dislike it more than Nelly."

"Of course. And it is so vulgar of mamma."

"'Sh! Don't speak so."

"Just because Uncle George is a clever lawyer and has been run up the tree, and ends with an earldom, mamma never has the Mortimers off her lips. As if anybody cared two straws for these new peerages either!"

"Oh, I should like a new peerage very well," quoth Gertrude good-humouredly. "I could bear the weight of it with alacrity if it were forced on me—or rather on papa. I think 'Lady Gertrude,' would sound nice; and I don't fancy you would object to 'Lady Amabel' either. But 'Lady Nelly'—"

"Yes, 'Lady Nelly.' That is just what Nelly is, and what she will look like. But mamma has got it up into 'Lady Helen Mortimer,' and—"

"And somehow 'Lady Helen Mortimer'

has quite a grand, consequential ring about it. I wonder if it would be possible to transform little Nelly into a grand and consequential personage by the same process. She is such a dear little simple thing—such a perfect Nelly, or Dolly, or Susy—that perhaps if we begin to parade her as ‘Lady Helen’ she may learn to give herself the proper and adequate airs, patronise us all, sweep out of a room before us—”

“Nonsense!” said her sister sharply.

“And not be overpowered when that high and mighty prince, our august cousin Lionel, deigns to bend his haughty brows in her direction,” concluded Gertrude, slily nodding towards the figure in the window.

“Look at Master Lionel now. He was the least little bit taken aback three minutes ago, when he heard who was coming, or I am mistaken. He—”

“Nonsense!” said Amabel again.

“Nonsense if you please, but nonsense that may prove to be very good sense all the same. I know what I know. I know

where Lionel was stopping last week, and I mean to keep my eyes and ears open this Christmas, and see what drops into them. Nelly was eighteen last week, and—”

“Here she is!” For the door had suddenly been flung open to its widest extent, and there appeared a plump, youthful figure, furred to the throat, whose rosy, bashful, excited, and withal somewhat alarmed little face, seemed alike to seek a welcome and a refuge.

“Lady Helen Mortimer!” bawled the footman. Never before had Nelly been received in like fashion.

“We were just beginning to wonder what had become of you, my love,” cheerfully cried her aunt and hostess, rustling forward with enfolding arms. “So glad you are here at last,” with a kiss on both cheeks. “What cold little cheeks! And what a day for your long, tiresome journey. Frozen? No, your hands are as warm as mine,” pulling off the traveller’s furry gloves. “Amabel—Gertrude! and here is your own little man,” who was already clinging round his cousin’s knee. “And

—but I need not trouble you with everybody,” looking round, “the gentlemen are going off to billiards; Lionel has gone already, I see. Gertrude, don’t touch that cold tea-pot; I have ordered some to be ready fresh for Nelly, and here it comes. And, Nelly, how did you leave your dear papa? We did so hope you would have brought him with you. If it had been only for a couple of days it would have been something.”

Now Mrs. Hayward was by no means an unkindly woman, but it must be confessed that her motherless niece, her own brother’s only child, had never been greeted quite like this before. Hitherto Nelly’s footing at Angleford Priory had been that of a young relation, pure and simple, and with her Aunt Isabella that position was one clearly and distinctly defined. Young relations were certainly to be remembered for holiday invitations, but they could be put off, if desirable, at a moment’s notice. Young relations were expected to be ready to do anything required of them, go anywhere expected of them, give up their

places for any sight or show, if these were wanted for more important people—entertain each other, and find or make their own amusements in out-of-the-way corners of the house. In short, they were in no single respect to be a trouble or burden either to herself, or any member of the family.

Little Nelly, her own niece, who had but a dull home and absent-minded parent, had perhaps come off as well as any one so insignificant could. She had been a “Good little thing,” and a “Poor little thing,” and had been felt to have a sort of claim in a humble way upon the Priory at Christmas and at Midsummer ; but it may be safely conjectured that never until the present snowy afternoon, when the “Lady Helen Mortimer”—only so styled within the few past weeks—ran forward in her little fur coat and hat to be embraced and welcomed, did any glow of real warmth inspire the bosom to which she was immediately pressed.

Yet Nelly was as soft and sweet, and bubbling over with pretty feelings and

kindly fancies, and sensible, practical little plots and plans for the good of all who came near her, as though she had been cradled in tenderness from her babyhood. Nelly could not hear of a sick child or a disappointed playmate, or anybody in any sort of trouble without stirring her busy brain round and round to find the wherewithal to cheer and comfort. Nelly never believed in any one's being cold or unkind or neglectful towards herself. If things went badly with her—and things will go badly with everybody at times—she would plaintively hang her little head like a willow before the storm, and meekly bide her time till the sun came out again. As for running about lamenting and whining, and venting her discomfort on the heads of those about her, that was not the young girl's way. There never was, in brief, a sweeter nature; and, in consequence, even her august cousins entertained for her, as we have seen, a certain superior goodwill; even her aunt picked no holes in her, and her uncle smiled when he met her, and the world at large took her to its heart.



She now sat up on the largest sofa in the drawing-room looking delightedly around. Here she was! How nice, how very, very nice it was to be here! How wonderful that Christmas had really come at last! How beautiful the snow looked! Snow in London was different—everything in London was different. Oh, of course it was very nice in London (slightly faltering), but she did wish poor papa would not have insisted on staying there. He had certainly assured her that it was from choice, not necessity, that he did so; he had said that he was too old for long winter journeys, and that he had his club, and his old friends, and would be very snug and comfortable while she was away; and she supposed (somewhat wistfully) that he knew best. But of one thing she was certain—he must not be left for long. And now (brightening up again), did Uncle Hayward really think the frost would last, and let them have some skating? And was the church to be decorated the same as last year, and were they all to help? Were Amabel and Gertrude going to the

Christmas ball at K——? What! Was *she* to go? Oh, how kind, how very, very kind. She had never thought of that. Oh yes, she had a frock, she thought she had a frock that would do, but if her aunt did not consider it smart enough, Justine could easily send to town for a skirt, and run up a bodice in a day—Justine was so clever. And papa had increased her allowance, and she had quite a heap of money.

The round, warm little cheek flushed rosier than ever with excitement and talking, and the blue eyes quite blazed.

(“She is almost pretty,” quoth Mrs. Hayward to herself. “And no one can say that Nelly is not a dear little thing.”) Aloud: “And, Nelly, we are going to have a little dance ourselves, and some tableaux. You have never taken part in tableaux, have you? I thought not. Oh, but you will do very well; you will find plenty of others no better than yourself. Even little George takes a part.”

“How delightful, auntie!”

“Everything is delightful with you, I think, Nelly.”

“ Oh yes, auntie.”

“ You will not even find us rather dull this first evening ? ”

“ Dull ! Oh, auntie ! ”

“ I dare say you are often duller at home, poor child. But we have really hardly anybody here yet. The most of the people come to-morrow—”

“ Who wants peoples ? ” broke out a small indignant voice, the outraged dignity of which it is impossible to describe. “ Nelly’s comed to see *me*,” announced Master George, and settled the question.

Nelly was dressed and down, ready for dinner long before any one else. With her the next move was always so full of interest, and demanded such swift attention, that even at the Priory, where no one was ever hurried or eager, or thought of being excited over any prospect, there was no resisting the desire to bustle forward, be on the alert, and see what was going to happen next.

Into the long, dimly-lit drawing-room she danced now, light as a fairy and gay

as a humming-bird. To be first down was charming—like everything else.

“How delightful! How delightful!” (She had exclaimed the same a dozen times within the hour). “Oh, these delightful great wood fires! These delightful old bowls of rose leaves! This delightful—” and then the door opened, and some one came in. “How do you do, Lionel?” said Nelly, demurely for her. “Oh, isn’t it delightful here?” she cried the next minute.

“Is it?” said Lionel, looking down upon her from a great height above. He was a dark, grave young man, and there was a general feeling about him that he was difficult to amuse. Certainly the Priory people did not invariably succeed in amusing him. He would look bored and indolent and exhausted openly, at times, when there. He looked none of these now. “Is it?” said he, and as he had always acted kindly and spoken kindly to little Nelly Mortimer, the cousin of his cousins, and a very old friend and playmate, she had never before found it

difficult to meet his eye, and reply to his words. But to be sure she did not think she had done anything wrong; and they had been such good friends when she and Lionel had been together lately; and though she had not seen him to say "Good-bye," he had surely known it was his own fault, for he had taken French leave one afternoon after she had left the house openly and avowedly for some hours. And so—but why, then, did he look at her thus strangely, and breathe thus quickly, and then suddenly put out his hand and take hers a second time.

"Nelly," he said suddenly, in a voice that hardly sounded like his own, "believe me, I did not know that I should meet you here. I have not designed this; I give you my word I have not. If any one had dropped a hint—of course I knew you usually did spend Christmas at the Priory, but somehow I certainly fancied I had heard you were going somewhere else this year, and it was not until you were actually at the door that I knew you were expected."

“Well?” said Nelly, with round eyes. “Well?” What she meant was, But why should I not have come? And why should you not meet me here? And what in the world do you mean?

“As it is,” continued her companion, obviously pursuing his own line of thought, “as it is, I will leave to-morrow, if you wish it.”

“If I wish it!” She had no words for more.

“Am I to go, Nelly?”

To go? And why? Because she had come? How unkind, how strange of Lionel! And he had always been so particularly nice and pleasant to her, and she had really thought he—he was rather fond of her, and she was sure she—and a lump came and stuck in Nelly’s throat.

Two blue, speechless, despairing eyes were turned upon her questioner.

“Shall I be in your way?” he, however, persisted.

In her way? Oh, the idiot! If he were not to be in her way, she would be in his. Where would be the sense of his being

at the Priory at all if he were not to be in her way? She had been reckoning on his being in her way all the time as she came along that day. Did all this then mean, that he purposed to throw her over as a companion, take up with Amabel and Gertrude and their fine young lady visitors, who were never much to Nellie, but who might, of course, be more fit company for Lionel, often as she had known him turn his back on them before? That must be it, and now he wanted to show her that she was not to hang on to him and trouble him, and perhaps not—not interfere between him and some one else. Oh, dear, if that was it, she—she—she thought he need not be afraid, he had spoken in good time. The hand he still held was dropped on the instant.

Nelly, you see, was still almost a child, and this was her first, her very first peep into womanhood.

“By Jove! She knows nothing.”

It had taken the young man all this time to arrive at so simple a conclusion. Neither he nor Nelly were clever people,

and each was so fully engaged in contemplating one side of the point at issue to the exclusion of the other, that it was actually only now that Miss withdrew her hand, and Master attained the solution of the mystery.

“By Jove! Her father has never told her! Yet,” continued young Lionel to himself, “he assured me he had personally no sort of objection. It was Nelly, he said, who would not hear of love and matrimony. I begin to understand. She *has* not heard, but—that is no reason why she should not hear, my kind friend, and by your leave I’ll not put my luck in your hands a second time.”

His brow cleared—but the door opened.

“What! Two folks down already?” exclaimed a mocking, mischievous voice. “I declare, Lionel, you are improved beyond all recognition. Who ever knew you in time for dinner before? And what made you in such a hurry, Nelly? I have not written the *menu* cards yet; that was why I scrambled down. Oh, go on, go on with what you were saying; I shan’t interrupt.



No, you cannot help me, my dear, you had much better continue your conversation with Lionel; and pray do not either of you address me, or I shall most certainly put down white soup instead of brown, and partridges in place of pheasants."

("You suspect something, Miss Gertrude," concluded one of the two thus defrauded.)

("Oh, why does Gertrude look at me like that?" thought the other.)

And now, behold! a strange and wonderful thing which straightway came to pass. Before many hours were passed the blithe, brisk little fairy who had flown northward on the wings of the wind all agog for mirth and sport, gleeful and heartwhole, and with every sober thought left behind that merry Christmas season, this joyous sprite of a Nelly had vanished into the thinnest of thin air, and who in all the wide world should appear to take her place but the "Lady Helen Mortimer!"

Lady Helen Mortimer did not wish to ride one morning, thank you, Lionel Clavering; she was going to walk with

her cousins. Lady Helen had no time to be taught billiards that afternoon, she had promised to finish a piece of work for her aunt. Lady Helen was so tired later on, that she could not romp with Georgie as she had promised.

Lady Helen never seemed able to fix an appointment, nor agree to a proposal.

Formerly, little Nelly was at everyone's beck and call, only too pleased to fall in with every project, and join in every merrymaking. Now, she had to be first found—she was never hanging about the halls and anterooms as of yore—then openly petitioned, then argued with, and finally, as often as not, left in a huff. The fine young ladies who had assembled for the ball, and who had never met her little ladyship before, were quite impressed by her airs, and treated her with infinitely more respect than they would otherwise have done. Mrs. Hayward was delighted. She had never dared to hope that such a chit as Gerald's poor little daughter would understand how to keep up the family credit so well. Amabel and Gertrude

stared and sneered, and all the love they had ever borne their orphan relative quickly faded from their hearts.

“Little upstart!” said Amabel. “Who would have believed it? I actually heard her telling Clara Crossley that she was older than she looked, and that she did not allow people to take liberties with her. Poor Clara looked quite amazed, but I could see that the silly little goose was not thinking of her at all, but was aiming it at Lionel, who was standing in the window. As if Lionel were ever thinking about her at all!”

“If he were, she has given him a good deal to think about,” rejoined Gertrude. “She has taken *my* breath away, I frankly own. Little did I expect that she would have learned her lesson at such a pace! But, to be sure, if she has got Lionel into her head I think I know of a way to drive him out of it. A little, a very little teasing, an arch look here and there, and a double meaning—oh, Nelly will be easily managed.”

“There is not much management re-

quired," said Amabel. "For my part, I have no doubt Lionel thinks as I do that the child is insufferable. She was well enough before, but now even Georgie complains of her."

As well poor Georgie might. Even if he got the outward form of his beloved Nelly of old to himself, and bore her off to his own haunts, the spirit was not there. Even if she played with him, or read to him, or sang to him, he could, child as he was, perceive that her heart was not in the book nor the game. When they walked together she would be silent half the time.

But Lionel fared still worse than he. If Lionel dropped into the chair next Lady Helen's at breakfast, luncheon, or dinner, he was sure to find some engrossing topic started on the instant betwixt his neighbour and the person beyond. If he met the young lady on the stair, or in the avenue, or garden, she was "just running out," or "just running in," or "just running" somewhere, it mattered not where—obviously it was where he was not expected to follow, and that was enough. If

he sauntered into the library or girl's morning room, or any place whence issued voices and laughter, Lady Helen would all of a sudden purse herself up, and be so industrious, and absorbed, and unapproachable, that it would have been absolute sacrilege to disturb her.

Being Christmas-time it was thought proper to relax the severity of winter evenings at the Priory with Christmas games, round games, guessing games; childish frolics in which none of the elegant Haywards would have dreamed of participating at any other season, but of which Nelly had always been the head and front. But even Amabel showed more alacrity when it came to be her turn to go out into the hall with Lionel than Lady Helen did. Even "that stupid Crossley girl"—Nelly's private term for the unoffending Clara—even she performed miracles in the way of smart answers as compared with the prim little Londoner.

Lady Helen would not even be induced to give her vote for music, though Lionel sang like a blackbird, and Amabel and

Gertrude and all the other young people assembled were very ready to hearken and applaud. He always missed one voice, and when the evening was over he would know well enough where to look for one small figure in the background. He did not think that it was altogether because Nelly had no ear for music that she ensconced herself in that distant window-seat, and I am afraid that the young man was not quite so hopelessly deceived as by every rule he should have been. Once or twice he smiled to himself, the rogue ! and he never said another word about leaving the Priory, but made himself more amiable and more at home there than he had ever been known to do before.

Then came the ball.

“ Yes, my dear, you look very nice, very nice indeed. Justine has great credit in you ; Frenchwomen have such taste. That little blush of pink in your sash and bows is just the thing to relieve the deadness of the white,” cried her aunt. “ And, Nelly, I do not think I need tell you, my love, to be a little particular about your partners,

need I? You understand? Your position demands it now—but you seem to feel that very sensibly. No one whom *I* do not introduce, my dear, or who is not of *our* party, need you accept. Make that your rule. As we have plenty of gentlemen you will be at no loss.”

“And you can always have Lionel to fall back upon,” added Gertrude from behind.

How Nelly’s cheeks did burn! And, after all, was Lionel never going to ask her—never going to come near her?

He let dance after dance go by, while she spun and twirled and tossed her little head, and tried to pass as near him as she could on the arm of one and another. He and Clara Crossley were *vis-à-vis* to Lady Helen and her partner in a square dance, when it was really a treat to see the way her small ladyship strutted past, and stuck her dimpled chin in the air.

She had no dance free for young Claver-ing, she really thought, after that. Ultimately she did find one, which they solemnly performed together, and during which there was not a trace of the old

Nelly to be seen. The other poor lads who had their turns with her, felt themselves unaccountably small that evening. Nothing they did was right, and their choicest small-talk was snapped into bits before they knew what they were about. Once only did a glimmer of the bright little rosebud of old peep out. Somebody asked Lady Helen if she were having a good ball, and what she thought of the floor, the music, and the decorations?

“I think they are all beautiful,” said Nelly, “but then, you see, I never was at a ball before.”

It was well that her aunt did not hear her, and that some one else did, some one in whose ears the sweet, simple little answer rang over and over again afterwards.

But even Gertrude gave up defending Nelly after that evening.

“I could stand all that went before,” she said. “I saw the child’s head was turned, and there was no more to be said about it. But when it came to her insisting on papa’s taking her in to supper—her!—Nelly!—I could hardly believe my



ears! I had said some little thing about Lionel—but it could not have been that. I don't suppose Lionel had even been going to offer her his arm, for he never went in to supper with anybody; I saw him go in all by himself long afterwards. But Nelly is too absurd! I declare I feel inclined to give her a good shaking—and I should, if it were to do any good, little goose that she is! There are the Whichcote girls, born in the purple, every one with a handle to her name, and they think no more of themselves than if they were the daughters of the parish schoolmaster. Why cannot the stupid little creature see that? No one thinks one atom less of the Whichcotes because they make no parade of themselves. I am afraid people will laugh at *us*—that is the worst of it,” summed up the young lady, with a frown. It being her own custom to ridicule, she stood in more fear of being ridiculed than did any one else.

In a sadly discontented frame of mind she read out the list of *dramatis personæ* for the tableaux next day. She had her-

self arranged them when in a blither mood, and even now there was a faint echo of underlying mischief when she came to one combination, and looked round to see the effect. The girls were alone in the morning room—Amabel, Nelly, and the other young lady visitors—and Gertrude was called upon to produce her programme.

“The Huguenots,” drawled the reader with a yawn. “The Huguenots—Mr. Lionel Clavering, and Lady Helen Mortimer. You and Lionel, Nelly.”

“What!” cried Nelly, bounding from her chair.

“Millais’ picture, my dear. A most effective scene. A little affectionate in the attitude perhaps, but then as Lionel is our cousin, and you have known him all your life, and as he is so much older besides, nobody could think there was any harm in it. You will be just the right height for him. Bless the child, what’s the matter? Good gracious! These new tantrums!” cried Gertrude, looking round as the door banged behind a flying figure. “Upon my word, Lady Helen Mortimer is

going to give us a nice time of it all round."

All the rest of that afternoon Lady Helen was invisible. No, she was not in her own room, nor yet in the library, nor in the gallery, nor apparently anywhere, no one had seen her, no one knew where she was.

Tea-time came, and the fact could no longer be concealed. "She must be out, I suppose," quoth Gertrude, as unconcernedly as she could; but she whispered to the rest to say nothing of the little previous scene upstairs.

"Out? Impossible!" cried Mrs. Hayward. "Are you in earnest? Do you really mean it? But the child could not have been so foolish. And if she did think of it, why did none of you stop her? The idea of letting her go out on such a day; and it is getting dark too! If I did but know in which direction to send—" looking perturbedly from the window—"but you only suppose it? You only guess she is out? You have no certainty—"

“Lionel is out too,” said Amabel quietly ; and silence fell upon the room.

But this was hardly fair, for as a matter of fact it was only at the precise moment of the remarks being made, that the absentees came in sight of each other. Lionel, as we have seen, had not been present during the explosion, and how amazed was he then, on tramping leisurely home through slush and sleet after a hard day’s shooting, to stumble across a heated, flushed, draggle-tailed little figure, also bearing for the Priory through mud and mire, who had for him such a short answer and such an averted face, that instinct told him this must be allowed to go on no longer.

“Nelly !” he exclaimed, “what in the name of wonder—what are you doing here ? At this hour ? On such a day ? All alone ? Where have you been ? And what—what is the matter ?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, nothing of course ; but still—” and he changed his gun to the other shoulder. “Now, take my arm,” he said,

for she was halting at every step. "What? You won't? Why not, Nelly?"

"I—never mind—I don't need it."

"You do need it."

"I—I won't have it then!"

"That's the truth, at any rate. You are angry with me," continued Lionel, after a pause. "But how have I offended you? You have avoided me, looked coldly at me, and answered me sharply ever since—you know when. Now, Nelly, I mean to know why." He was in no hurry; he had found his time at last; and the harvest, he considered, was ripe for the reaping.

But poor Nelly only panted breathlessly.

"I have never sought you out, I have never said one word, nor sought to better my chance in any way since our first meeting here," said Lionel, "and you were all that was kind and gentle then. I offered to go, and you told me not to go. You seemed—but no matter. What have I done since? What have I done *now*?"

She could not honestly say he had done anything.

“But you have certainly shunned me, and mistrusted me, Nelly?”

She hung her head; it was herself, not him, she had mistrusted.

“And now,” continued the speaker, more boldly, “now some one or something has vexed you afresh, and you have run out here to be rid of your trouble. Oh, you don’t need to tell me, I know all about it.” (“If I did not,” subjoined he inwardly, and glancing downwards, “that start would have informed me.”) “Now, then,” and he bent closer over her, “now, then, tell me what it was?”

He did *not* know then. How he had startled her! She had almost thought, had half credited him with what would have been too horrible—co-operation with Gertrude and those others in their scheme to entrap her. Now she drew a long, long breath of relief, “I—but I cannot tell you, Lionel.”

“Can’t you? I wish you could. However, you can tell me this. Where have you been? And why did you come so far?” For he felt sure that beneath the

heavy, muddy, wintry skirts the little feet were weary and aching.

“I have been to the village. I had a telegram to send.”

“Oh.” A pause. “And could no one have gone for you?” demanded he next. “Could not you have sent some messenger, your own maid even—?”

“Oh, yes, Justine would have gone in a moment, but—but I did not wish any one to know, until I had had an answer. I have had an answer now, however,” said Lady Nelly, gathering together all her courage, “I waited at the post office until it came. It is from papa, and he says he has no objection to my—my going home to-morrow.”

“You telegraphed for his permission?” said Lionel quietly. He had half expected this.

“Yes, and I prepaid the answer, and waited for it;” and in the importance of the moment, Lady Helen could not help showing that she had done something rather clever in her own estimation. Verily it had been a daring deed; but she

had done it, and in the first flush of triumph was able to feel herself proud of it. If only Lionel had not thus come in her way! She had been posting home, trying not to feel tired and frightened—for she had never in her life been out alone at that hour—and supporting every step with the prospect of throwing her little bombshell the very instant of her return, and now he had—well, the truth must be told, he had rather taken the cream off the whole. He was so kind, so sober, and so matter-of-fact—and, say what she might, so guiltless, that she could not feel quite the pleasure she should have done in leaving him behind with all the rest at the Priory.

“Does your father want you very much?” was all he now said.

“Papa? Oh, no. It is not he—he does not want me at all. It is I who want to go,” explained the young girl eagerly, and at once falling into the snare. “I asked him. All he says is that I may do as I choose. But I *do* choose,” with sudden fire, “I choose to go at once. I



would go to-night if I could. I would never go near that house again if I could help it. They—they—”

“What have they done?” said Lionel, in a deep, stern voice. Nothing had ever been done or said amiss before him, but somehow the conviction now burned within his breast that this was his hour, and that, come what might, he must make it bear its full fruition. “What have they done?” said he, standing still to face her in the dusk. “Nelly, if you can tell me truthfully that all of this is none of my business, that it does not concern me, and has nothing to do with me, I will not ask you another question, and I will take care of you home, and see you off to-morrow, and all shall go on exactly as it was before, but if—oh, no, you can’t, you shall not, you *must* not say it, for dear, I love you, and—and—” and the next moment his arms were round her, and she was sobbing aloud on his breast.

It was well the light was nearly gone, and that they were off the high road besides.

“ Oh—oh—oh,” sobbed Nelly, too happy for words.

“ It *was* about me, then ? ” whispered Lionel.

So then of course she had to tell him all, for why should she not ?

She had never thought about him, never (with most solemn emphasis)—never once thought about him, till after that first evening, and then—and then she had been so dreadfully afraid of any one’s seeing or finding out—and above all of his doing so, in case she had been mistaken—that she had—had—yes, she had run away from him and avoided him ; and then Aunt Hayward had given her the idea of pretending to be set up by her new title and dignity, and so she had tried—had tried to do her best—

“ Poor little bird ! ”

“ But I couldn’t do it very well, Lionel, and—and I am so afraid—oh, I am so afraid that when Gertrude said *that* to-day some of the others—”

“ Well ? ”

“ Smiled,” said Nelly, almost suffocating.

“That was what made me most angry of all. I am sure they did, all but Amabel, and Amabel—”

“What did Amabel do?”

“She—looked.”

“Looked to see how you looked?”

“Yes.”

“And you?” And his arm pressed her a little closer.

“Oh, I banged out of the room.”

“Bravo!” said Lionel, taking care she should not see his face. “Bravo, Nelly! If that did not enlighten them, nothing would!”

“Oh, Lionel, have I done so very badly?”

“Very, very badly, Nelly.”

“Do you—” but she looked up into his eyes, and saw that they were laughing. “What *do* you mean Lionel? You are not vexed with me?”

“Vexed with you!” And that point was settled at once. “Now, my little love,” said he, presently, “listen to me, and you will see the whole thing with other people’s eyes in half a minute. You never knew that I had spoken to your father for

you when I was at your house last in London, did you? No. But I thought you had known, till after we had had our little explanation together on that first evening upon the hearthrug. That enlightened me, but it appears it only half enlightened you. Then you began to act a part. Dear, how I rejoiced to find you acting it so badly. The wonder is that anybody was taken in ; all the little airs and graces were so palpably put on. But I felt sure that you had begun to care for me from that time, Nelly, and I did not want to hurry you. *I* knew where the real little Nelly lay, warm and true underneath, and how soon we should get rid of the mock fine lady, the ‘Lady Helen,’ in whose guise this little maid was masquerading. Nay, don’t hang your head ; it was a brave attempt, and I love my darling dearly for it ! Now see, the snow is beginning to fall, and we must stay out no longer ; I dare say you have given them a fright as it is. Then come, come, come : come along, little Nelly ; and farewell for ever the ‘Lady Helen Mortimer.’”

## LADY JANE'S REVERIE.



My Lady Jane sits thinking—  
How odd ! But still it's true ;  
She has not thought for ages,  
She has so much to do.

My lady goes out riding  
Along the sunlit Row,  
Where the gloss of life is gleaming  
On all the great June show.

My lady goes out dancing  
In vast saloons at night ;  
Flowers, jewels, laces perfect  
(She looks her best in white).

My lady does *some* flirting—  
A very little bit—  
And just because it's usual,  
And no harm comes of it.

O dear, she's always proper,  
My lord has naught to say ;  
She only smiles and whispers  
In the very *chic*-est way.

She goes to church quite often  
Though Sundays come so fast ;  
And there are so many people,  
And so much one must put past,

That 'tis like a perfect whirlwind  
Being just a little gay ;—  
But surely something happened  
A year ago to day ?

Something so very different  
From—well, from everything  
About this London season,  
With its riot, dash, and swing,

That she scarcely can remember ;  
And yet it must be true  
That some sweet thing befell her,  
Which was so strange and new

That it almost seemed like heaven  
Descended unto earth,  
Those hours of hushèd stillness  
After the baby's birth.

'Twas in this very chamber  
    She lay upon that bed,  
And in her bosom nestled  
    A soft, warm little head.

Two little hands went stretching  
    All over, up and down,  
And a little dewy forehead  
    Was wrinkled in a frown.

And fast and close she held him,  
    His cheek upon her cheek—  
He was so great a treasure,  
    And he not born a week !

His little pulses throbbing  
    Made her heart beat again ;  
The likeness to his father ?  
    O yes, it was quite plain.

And just to feel his breathing . . .  
    —A quick tap at the door :  
“ Your new ball-dress, my lady,”—  
    My lady dreams no more.

The tender thread is broken,  
    The softened glance is flown,  
Pleasure and Pride and Folly  
    Return to claim their own.

And O, the pity of it !

(For the little baby died).

And I think, but for that ball-dress,

Its mother might have—cried.

L. B. W.



# DIPLOMACY AMONG THE HAYCOCKS.

## SCENE I.

Boudoir in Bruton Street. The month of June. LADY FENELLA BLOOMFIELD, fine woman of forty, revelling in the first season of her first daughter, is seated at her davenport, with the said first daughter, otherwise CECILY, at her elbow.

LADY FENELLA (peevishly). Henley already? Why, it seems as if we had but just done with Ascot, and Ascot came hard upon your presentation, and—and—and—no, I really cannot have Henley just yet. It is quite too absurd, the pace at which we rattle on. No rest, day nor night. What with the New Club dances, the Bachelors' dinners, and the Hurling-

ham teas—what with bazaars, polo-matches, and Greek plays, my poor head is in such a muddle, that I asked the Bishop yesterday if it was he who was kicked by the riotous pony at the Grand Military last week, and hoped we should meet Captain Fitzracket at the laying of the foundation-stone at Bethnal Green this afternoon !

CECILY (with somewhat absent-minded sympathy). Poor mamma !

LADY F. And now you bring up Henley Regatta, of all things, to add to the turmoil ! It really is too much ! I used to like the poor old regatta week ; but that was before I had a great grown-up daughter to take about everywhere, and give entertainments for, and obtain invitations for, and watch the newspapers for, and know all about people's families for—ahem ! what am I saying ? Something foolish, no doubt. Pay no heed, my dear ; half the time I am going about just now, I am quite, absolutely irresponsible ; I am in a dream—dazed. I am talking aloud to one and another, and all the time

I am trying to keep my thoughts together, and to remember where I am, and what is going on. I am thinking, "Where do we go next? How soon can we get away from here? How long will the drive take?" I seem to be everlastingly whirling round and round in one vast machinery of engagements, and my greatest dread in life is lest I should forget one. If you knew the nightmares I have! Sometimes we are sitting for hours and hours in our carriage before a house whose door no one opens, though we can see the lights and people within; sometimes we can never get up the stairs to where our hostess stands at the top; last night it was the shoulder-seam of my new dress split—you may laugh, but it was too horrible. I cannot imagine what made me, even in a dream, think of such a thing. If I had been poor dear Mrs. Gladstone—but Marie is so careful about my clothes. I hope I shall never have *that* experience. Dear me, I must not run on; I must really finish my correspondence before we go out.

CECILY (drawing a step nearer). But, mamma, about Henley?

LADY F. About Henley? Well, if I must, I must. What about Henley?

CECILY. The dates are fixed for the seventh, eighth, and ninth of July.

LADY F. (with a little shriek). *And ninth!* What *can* you mean, child? You have named three days, not two! O, it is not possible, it is not *possible* that that odious regatta is to last for three whole dreadful days!

CECILY. Mamma! how very—(stops short, and turns her head aside).

LADY F. (sharply). How very what?

CECILY. Nothing.

LADY F. (after a moment's pause). Well, I suppose you can hardly be expected to see it with my eyes. After all, you are but a child yet, and until this spring, Henley Regatta was to you the great event of the year. But pray explain what you mean by naming three days instead of the usual two?

CECILY. There are really and truly to be three days of it this year, because last year there were so many entries—

LADY F. (impatiently interrupts). Spare me the details; the horrid fact is enough. If you are quite certain you have made no mistake—

CECILY (with considerable emphasis). I am quite, quite certain.

LADY F. (sighs). Well, there is no help for it. It is the end of June now, and, if we do not secure the rowing-men at once, people down there, who do not come to town, and have nothing else to think of, will take advantage of our absence from the Cottage, and make up their parties early, in the hope of cutting us out. That (with resolution) must not be permitted, whatever else we have on hand; and, dear me, there is the “Eton and Harrow” coming on, too,—

CECILY (eagerly). By going to the Cottage for Henley you will escape that.

LADY F. Escape it? Nonsense! Of course we return here.

CECILY. Hardly in time for the match. It comes off at the same time as the regatta this year.

LADY F. (not altogether so pleased as

might have been expected). Humph! (After a pause, recovers herself.) We must give that up, then, although I had intended to have a coach; but, however, as Henley is my fate, to Henley I will give my mind. For this one morning it shall be Henley, and Henley only.

CECILY silently places a list before her mother.

LADY F. (puts up her eyeglass). Good child. Yes, a list is always the first thing. Why, this will do very well, I think. (Reads, in an undertone.) Lingboroughs, Burlingtons, Maud Wouverman, Theresa Cross, cousins Jane and Susan—ye-es, well, perhaps we had better; little Rose Badderley—little flirting thing, but she will ornament the boat; Agatha Marchbanks? No, really I cannot and will not have Agatha; last year she was altogether too wild, throwing the things about at luncheon, and getting all the men to row her by herself up and down the course afterwards! I never was more annoyed. There was my sister Octavia, with that niece of Sir John's who had

never been with us before, and whom Octavia particularly wished to make things pleasant for—there they were, left behind, stranded on the bank, Miss—I really forget her name—dying to go on the water; and there was Agatha lolling back on her cushions, with all four men in attendance. O, I am quite determined she shall never have a chance of doing *that* under my wing again.

CECILY (placidly). Very well, mamma.

LADY F. All the rest will do. And now for rowers. They are the principal people at Henley Regatta, you know.

CECILY. I am afraid we shall be rather short-handed.

LADY F. Shall we? But you have always plenty of partners.

CECILY. For dancing? Yes; or rather for sitting out. Two-thirds of them won't, and one-third can't, dance; while as for rowing, I have racked my brains in vain to think of *one* of whom I have heard it said he is a good oar.

LADY F. (with a bright thought). But where are those we had last year?

CECILY. Gone, scattered, fled, or, more fatal still, snapped up by somebody else. We have let the time go by—

LADY F. (tartly). Nonsense! The time is not gone by at all. We have but to set to work at once; what about Captain Scofell?

CECILY. He row! He would develop a heart-complaint on the spot, and vow he had had it all his life!

LADY F. Captain Chester?

CECILY. Lungs would do for him. I think I hear his solemn protest that he has doctor's orders for not risking a whole day in the open air.

LADY F. Lord Harry Thripp?

CECILY. Harry would get at the champagne before we were off, and upset us all, and a dozen more in the lock.

LADY F. Richard Theobald?

CECILY. Richard weighs twenty stone; and so, though he would certainly help to row a boat-load, the rest of the boat-load would equally certainly object to rowing him.

LADY F. (waxing alarmed, and, in con-



sequence, irritable). We shall never get on if we are to be so particular. There is the little man who was here last night; what is his name? Cunningham.

CECILY. He left England for the East this morning.

LADY F. (throws herself back in her chair). At least let us secure the new curate.

CECILY. Too late; the new curate is secured by the old vicar.

## SCENE II.

A riverside lawn sloping down from the Cottage, three miles above Henley.

LADY FENELLA has just arrived, and is sipping her tea beneath the rustling shade of the elms, and placidly awaiting the arrival of the afternoon post. It is the day but one before Henley Regatta opens.

LADY F. (looking around her). Dear me, how sweet, how lovely, how peaceful it all is! How deliciously the scent of the syringa mingles with that of the heliotrope and the new-mown hay! Do I smell the

hay? Hardly, from over the water; it must be the tea in my cup. At any rate, that hay-field is charming to look upon, and the reflection of the wagon, with all the bright red and white haymaking girls near it, is quite pretty enough for a picture. How lucky that we did not cut our hay before! It all adds to the picturesqueness of this dear abode, and I am sure every one who comes to-morrow will be enchanted. More boats coming round the river-bend, I declare! What a number have passed already! Now that the warm weather has come at last, there will be a regular rush to take advantage of it. Ascot was spoilt, and so was everything else, by the miserable rain and wind; but Henley is going to keep up its new, not its old, character. More boats still, and all going the same way! It is positively exhilarating, now that our own party is so happily made up, and that my little piece of diplomacy has succeeded so admirably. She suspects nothing, dear child. Well, my mind is now quite at ease, and—ha, the postbag!

(A pause ensues, during which Lady F. is seen to colour, draw up her head, and open her eyes in very evident astonishment.)

LADY F. Really—well, really—I—I—upon my word, what will not young men do now-a-days? Do I see aright? Every note almost an exact counterpart of the other. Mr. Johnson, Mr. Thomson, and Mr. Jacobson all sending the same excuse, which is no excuse at all! All “hoping to meet on the ground, but unable to join the party earlier in the day.” Hoping to meet on the ground, indeed! What do I or any of us want with any one of them “on the ground”? For what do these shameless young persons suppose they were invited? To eat my luncheon, drink my wine, and flirt with my girls? I could have got many of the best men in town to do that. Mr. Johnson, Mr. Thomson, and Mr. Jacobson were invited to *row*. We had to fall back on them (as no doubt they have by this time discovered) because even Sylvester Sequin and Captain Fitzracket chose to give

themselves airs. Ridiculous enough in them; but for these boobies, these mere country bumpkins, whom nobody ever heard of till they were created by our dire necessity, it is intolerable. Cecily, Cecily! (Calls, and frantically waves her parasol.)

CECILY (emerging from a bower of green, rosy and smiling). This dear garden! I feel as if I never wished to go away from it again. See, mamma, this branch of honeysuckle; and all my roses are dropping with the heat; and look what astride the leader of your favourite wellingtonia has taken, and—

LADY F. (with a somewhat peculiar expression). You are really a country girl at heart, I do believe. I had thought a season in town would have made you of another mind. However, listen now, child; this is provoking enough to put you, as well as me, out of tune. Here we were so happy and comfortable, thinking everything was so well arranged for: the hampers had arrived, and the extra beds in the village been secured, and now read

those (holding out the three notes of the three defaulters).

CECILY reads one after another without comment, apparently somewhat at a loss.

LADY F. (impatiently). Well? (tapping her foot on the gravel.) Well? well?

CECILY. (slowly). This is very—I am afraid this will put us out.

LADY F. Put us out! That it certainly will. I must say you take it coolly. You seem to forget how we struggled and toiled to get the right people together for this regatta week, and how unaccountably every one of those most eligible excused themselves—

CECILY. As I foresaw they would.

LADY F. You did not foresee that the second-best would go and do likewise?

CECILY. I thought it possible.

LADY F. At least you presumed that those who had said they would come would keep their word?

CECILY (aside). They have kept it—for me. (Aloud.) I wonder why they have failed us?

LADY F. (ironically). Small room for

wonder, my dear ; they have not had even the decency to forge excuses. Hoping to meet on the ground ! O, no doubt we shall meet on the ground ; and no doubt they will be willing enough to stop beside us there, keeping off all the better people. They may even condescend to trundle us up and down the course between the races, I presume. If I can possibly avoid allowing that—Cecily, we must have Jack Munster, after all.

CECILY. Do you think we must ?

LADY F. (with energy). He is the only person who can help us at this pinch. We had not meant to invite him ; we objected to his behaviour last year, singling you out and making you so very remarkable ; taking you alone with him on the water after dusk, too,—cousin though he is, he had no right to presume on the relationship. Still— (A long pause. LADY FENELLA looks first thoughtful, then penetrating, then profoundly sore pressed ; last of all, resolute and of high courage, as a woman should be who walks up to the cannon's mouth at the

call of duty.) Private considerations must go to the winds at a time like this. Write to Jack by this afternoon's post.

CECILY turns slowly to obey. LADY F. calls her back.

LADY F. Look, child, who are those on that launch ?

CECILY. The Doulton party. They are waving to us now. We could almost speak to them. Shall I ask where they are going to anchor? I know they have engaged the place.

LADY F. (in great agitation). For Heaven's sake, no! Make believe not to hear. They will inquire about our party directly, and how *shall* we say— Look what hosts of white flannels they have on their deck; (bitterly) any number of lazy, useless men can be had when there is nothing to be done, but not one when there is any real need for them. Men are the most unmanageable creatures. It was through Geoffery's obstinacy, at the first that we are in this plight now, for if he had not set his face against inviting any other of his friends, for fear of affronting

Jack— By the way, Cecily, if we invite Jack, it will make all that right also. Geoffery says he can bring a whole crew of Oxford boys; and they can row infinitely better than the best we could have got by ourselves. It was only this folly about Jack—but, however, he shall no longer be the spoke in the wheel, since by including him, we fill the boat.

### SCENE III.

#### AMONG THE HAYCOCKS.

CECILY alone, on a bit of the hayfield overhanging a shady backwater, well out of sight of the house, and indeed of every one but the ducks flopping up and down, now beneath the surface, now above it; the water-hens solemnly sailing about, while their broods run hither and thither on the glossy carpet of water-lily leaves; the swallows skimming and dipping; the kingfishers gleaming blue among the thicket of green stems on the other bank; and perchance the



cuckoo, faltering in his July note, who, hidden himself, may yet contrive to keep an eye on her. Distant sounds of voices and laughter continually fill the air, but no boat turns out of its course to pry into the thick jungle of the little narrow backwater this day, for all are too much intent on pressing forward towards the scene of the morrow's contest.

CECILY sits perfectly still, and her red parasol, which may be kept open—who can say?—to charm the water-fowl, and seduce them to draw near on a journey of inspection, is the only guide for any who comes in search of her—a pretty bit of colour in the milky, gray-green colourless July landscape.

CECILY (to the kingfisher). What a noise you do make! I can't hear anything for your rustling and fidgeting. You never are quiet for a single minute. Whoever heard of a bird like you making such a fuss, and all about a set of reeds!

CECILY (to the ducks). Splash, dash! In and out, in and out every second! You are very dear little roundabouts, but you are rather distracting, and, though you are not so impertinent as the kingfisher, somehow I wish you would keep still.

CECILY (to the maternal water-hen). Well, if I couldn't keep my family in better order—ah!—

CECILY (to some one who has never appeared on the scene before). Jack,—*Jack*,—JACK!

CECILY (in rising tones of mingled reproach and delight). Jack, when did you come? How did you come so soon? I never told you to come so soon. How did you find me? I never told you where to find me. Why, Jack—I—O Jack, how *can* you? Jack, you *know* you shouldn't! What would mamma say? Jack, let me go!

JACK (six foot high, slim as a maypole, brown as a berry, bold as brass). Not if I know it!

CECILY (half-laughing, half-crying, half-ashamed, and wholly and entirely happy).

O Jack, you do not know what a time I have had! I gave up all hope over and over again. I never thought I should be able to manage it. I have had to plot and plan, and suggest to mamma the most unlikely people who would be certain to refuse, and persuade her out of asking others who were dying to accept. Even up to yesterday our rooms were full, in spite of my best endeavours, and she had brought herself down to put up with a set of odd-come-short, half-and-half acquaintances; and think of it, Jack! I had to make a friend of one of them, and get him to give them all the hint that we should be better pleased to meet on the course than before starting. I did not exactly tell him all, but, O dear! I am afraid he will guess, and I shall never be able to look any one of the three in the face to-morrow. Isn't it *dreadful*? And mamma is so angry with them all, and I feel so guilty—for, of course, the poor things will come up all unconscious; and mamma.—Jack, you know how mamma *can* look!

JACK (nodding). Rather!

CECILY. Nobody can freeze like mamma.

JACK (dryly). My aunt has undoubtedly the gift.

CECILY. But, Jack, was it very bad of me? It was the only thing I could do, and we had promised ourselves that whatever happened we would have our Henley together. And I have been thinking of it all the summer, and all the London whirl we have been in, never once put it out of my head; and it seemed so hard if after all—we—we—we—(finally breaks down and weeps in his arms).

JACK (looking all at once a full-grown man, and speaking very gently and tenderly). See here, my darling, I want you to listen to me now. Cecily, do you know that I have something more to tell you, more even than I said that last night when we had our "Good-bye" out on the verandah? Will you hear it now?

CECILY. If—If there is time.

JACK. Time! You frightened little bird! How, time?

CECILY (demurely). Mamma will be so very much—disturbed, when she finds you have been here; she was having her afternoon nap, I suppose, when you arrived, but she will have come out of her room by this time, and—

JACK (smiling). She is out of it now.

CECILY (starting to fly homewards).  
Now!

JACK. Yes, now; you are too late. She not only knows that you are here, and that I am here, and that we are here together, but—

CECILY. Not another minute! Even now you may be sent away if she is vexed, and then all will have been in vain.

JACK. I think not.

CECILY. Do let me go!

JACK. No hurry. Just stop where you are. No, I shall not let you go. Running in a hot sun is bad for little girls. You need not wring your hands neither, my pretty puss; you had much better give them to me to take care of, if you can think of nothing else to do with them. That's right—so. I know what I am

about. Why, dear, (changing his tone once more)—why, Cecily, can you not trust me?

CECILY (breathless and crimson). If —if—

JACK (triumphantly). If I can prove to my dear little cousin that she is all at sea as to the real state of affairs at the present moment; that neither her papa nor mamma has the very slightest objection to our—ahem!—discreetly conversing out here in the hayfield for as long as ever we choose; that mamma had fully intended all along that, whoever came, or did not come, I should be one of her regatta-party; that she did not know the foolish little heart she had to deal with, and imagined that the foolish little head would have been so turned by all the fine gentlemen in town, that the foolish little nose would turn up at only poor Jack Munster if he were too easily obtainable; that, in consequence, she decided to pose as the victim of hard fate and the wiles of said foolish little daughter; if I can satisfy this open-eyed Cecily of mine that all the time she

was scheming, mamma was counter-scheming, and laughing in her sleeve at the success of her stratagems; if I can give my darling my solemn word of honour that she has only to ask her parents' consent to our marriage to obtain it with all imaginable celerity; that I have been in constant correspondence with my aunt on the subject ever since I came in for my uncle Robert's money, and she learned that I was no longer the poor penniless youngster she had found so objectionable last year, and that she even bade me God-speed as I rushed through the house on my way to the red parasol—why then, my dear little love, I think you will own that far-seeing and deep-scheming as you have undoubtedly shown yourself in this affair, you are a rank outsider as compared to Lady Fenella, in a match at diplomacy, with its finish among the haycocks.

## A HENLEY GHOST.



THE night is here, the day is done,  
The roar, the riot, and the fun  
Are dying out ; and one by one  
    The sparks expire,  
And those who lost and those who won  
    Alike retire.

Jem, have a pipe ; I'll tell you why  
Of introductions I was shy  
When pretty girls were standing by,  
    And you were kind,  
And signed and tried to catch my eye—  
    But I was blind.

Jem, five-and-twenty years ago.  
I came to see this Henley show,  
A baby freshman, pure as snow,  
    And mild as milk ;  
The down upon my lip, you know,  
    As soft as silk.



I had such pretty curly hair,  
Such a trim shape, so lithe and spare,  
In every frisk I had a share  
That merry day.

(Ah, dear, I see *me* everywhere  
Again, to day !)

Now, mark me, Jem, that brimming scene,  
That gorgeous, glittering, glimmering sheen  
Of pink and blue and gray and green,  
And all that's nice,  
Was changed for me that summer e'en  
To paradise.

Guess why? You may. Oh yes, 'twas  
*she*;

*She* did the trick; O, now I see  
Those witching glances cast on me  
That halcyon hour,—  
The drooping lash when silently  
She gave a flower.

No more I marked the gaudy crowd,—  
No more I hailed the victors proud,—  
No more I heard the laughter loud,—  
Or warning tone;  
For her, that little minx, I bowed  
My ear alone.

The woods below Park Place are fair,  
And many lovers wander there;  
So she and I—(they wondered where  
    We two had flown;  
Asked, had we melted into air?  
    Or turned to stone?)

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This afternoon, upon the lea,  
A comely dame, with manner free,  
Round, red, and radiant, pounced on me,  
    And “Could not pass.”  
“Did I remember?” *Jem, ’twas she!*  
    Alas!   Alas!

Ghost of a love not yet forgot,  
Ghost of a tender sacred spot,  
That all these years could never blot  
    From out my view;  
Unlucky chance!   How hard my lot  
    To meet with you!

For in one moment rose to sight  
The glamour of that summer night,—  
Those scented woods, that waning light,—  
    That hand in mine,—  
All that made up that lost delight,  
    That hour divine.

And *now* !—pull in the boat to shore ;  
Henley, farewell ! I'll go no more ;  
Regatta days for me are o'er—  
I'll draw the line.  
Confound it all ! the thing's a bore ;  
Let's go and dine.

L. B. W.

# ADA.

## THE TRUE STORY OF HER MARRIAGE.



No one was pleased about Ada's marriage, not even the bride and bridegroom elect themselves—or so, at least, ill-natured people said. The lady looked grave, the gentleman sour, when mention was made on the subject; his family disapproved, and hers raised an outcry; there was nothing to be gained, there appeared to be everything to be lost by the impending alliance, and why on earth they did it—but we had better leave conjecture alone, and tell in brief how the affair had begun, and how it seemed likely to end.

Ada Campion, a lively, dark-eyed girl of twenty-one, pretty after a fashion, charming in her own way, and neither too clever nor too exacting to make a plain man's

home happy, had, in an unwonted fit of soft-heartedness, agreed that that very plain man should be Mr. Philip Unwin, the master of a so-so grammar school, twenty years her senior, and twice that distance removed from her in point of disposition, tastes, and habits.

Being fatherless and motherless and twenty-one years of age, Miss Campion had been able to do as she chose in the matter, without reference to the opinion of any one, and as Mr. Unwin was in a respectable if somewhat homely position, and as he was properly born, educated, and settled in life, it appeared that, whatever might be the feelings of her friends and relations, they had not sufficient grounds for interference.

It would have been unfair to surmise that she wished there had ; that, having in a hasty moment, begotten of a variety of circumstances, given her word, and being endowed with a considerable share of that tough, old-fashioned virtue honour, which held her to it, the hapless damsel saw herself, as it were, netted, without hope of

deliverance. It was more charitable to give her credit for knowing her own mind, and discovering in Philip Unwin excellencies hidden from the world at large.

Ada never complained to any one, never made confidences, never invited sympathy.

The brave front she strove to carry was not, however, so well made up, but that whispers went abroad, and nods were exchanged behind fans, and significant glances passed, as time went on. Had Sir George been at home, confided one to another, the marriage would never have been so much *as* contemplated. It was unsuitable, if it were nothing else. It was not a union which could bring happiness to either. It contained in it an element of the ridiculous.

The Unwins—good people, excellent people *as* the Unwins, the head master of Quirinal College, and his mother and sisters, were—they were somehow the very last folks to be associated in any one's mind with little, soft, luxurious, tenderly nurtured Ada Campion. They were a sturdy, self-denying race, reared in habits of industry

and frugality. How should they assimilate with that easy, careless, childlike nature so unconscious of its own short-comings and deficiencies?

“I tell you, she is the most gentle and pliable creature in the world,” asserted the brother, when, for the fiftieth time or more, he had been driven to acknowledge that their ways were not Ada’s, and that at the outset much sympathy and co-operation in all that constituted the Unwin’s daily round, could hardly be looked for from her. “In a very short time she will fall in with our habits, take an interest in our pursuits, and make friends with our friends. She only requires instruction,” continued the head-master, with a slightly professional air. “Facile natures like Ada’s are quick to learn, and we must all unite in teaching. It will be a labour of love. No one could know Miss Campion without loving her.”

“Suppose she objects to being taught,” suggested his sister Jane. “I dare say she has her own views on things.”

“My dear Jane, she is the veriest child. I never knew any one so simple.”

“Her dress is not so very simple, I hear.”

“Who told you so?”

“The Joneses. They said she was travelling in the finest furs, and took her maid first-class with herself.”

“Absurd!” said Philip, angrily. “What had the maid’s going first-class to do with the furs? It seems to me that you allow your friends to discuss your future sister-in-law very impertinently.”

Which was true enough. There was not a gossip of Jane’s nor of Susan’s—nor, for that matter, of old Mrs. Unwin’s either—who had not had a voice in the matter behind backs. A girl who could take her maid first-class with herself in travelling, who could keep her own horse, and have her own banking account, and whose only consideration in ordering her summer or winter clothes was their suitability to her looks and the probable state of the weather, what sort of a wife was this for a quiet country-town schoolmaster, whose annual income did not exceed seven hundred pounds a year, and whose womankind had,



so far, put every stitch into his shirts with their own fair fingers ?

Naturally they had been horrified when they heard what had been done. Philip had engaged himself to a fine lady, and at the same time to a chit of a girl. The small dowry of five thousand pounds which Miss Campion would bring with her, and which, in truth, had barely sufficed for Ada's pin-money hitherto—all the rest being provided by the uncle and aunt, with whom she lived—would fly like the wind, if brought face to face with butchers and bakers, kitchen ranges and bassinets. A fashionable young madam would expect to sit down to an eight o'clock dinner every day, and would head the table in full evening dress. Would she, with such notions, and such habits, ever interest herself in the things they, Jane and Susan, cared for, or join in their pleasures, or make friends with their friends? Would not their brother—their shy, studious, sober-minded Philip—be routed out of his every-day, comfortable ways to take my lady about from one house to another—not the houses he knew

and was at home in, moreover—but to the big houses, the country seats, the places of the neighbourhood, through whose lodge gates, to tell the simple truth, Philip's sisters hitherto had only gazed, never dreaming of entering in? Philip had indeed himself been more fortunate, or unfortunate. His position had entitled him to certain solemn civilities, but these had not extended beyond a printed card of invitation every now and then, and the result had been a miserable time of it when the same had been accepted. He had never been in sympathy, nor in harmony, with the people he had met on such occasions. Self-consciousness had made him awkward, awkwardness had made him ashamed; and both feelings combined had prevented his being agreeable to anybody. In consequence, and as a very natural consequence, no one now ever thought of saying off-hand: "Come up to-night, and dine. Come and meet such an one," as would have been almost certainly the case, had Mr. Unwin, who was well enough looking, and a scholar, and a bachelor,

been a shade more attractive. He was let alone, and only summoned at the voice of duty.

Something of this was indirectly understood by the sisters, who now anticipated a different state of things ; and remembering the reluctance with which the ordeal of a dinner at this or that mansion had ever been faced, and the short replies and reserve with which their interrogations as to whom he had sat next, and what had passed, had invariably been met on his return, they could not but add it up now to the sum of Philip's ill luck, that he would in all probability, be frequently dragged at his future bride's chariot-wheels to such unhallowed spots.

And then arose another recollection. Would it not be odd for Philip's wife (it did not matter for Philip, of course ; their theory had always been that a man got asked everywhere), but would it not be odd and uncomfortable for Philip's wife to be going where they never went, and talking about people, and stopping with people whom they did not know ? What would

the Thomsons, and the Gibsons, and the Davises, and all the rest of them think? What would Ada herself think? She had never been at Quirinal College, and knew nothing of the ins and outs of the small society of the close in which the head master and his family lived. She had paid more than one visit in the neighbourhood, and Philip related with a touch of humour, tinged with foreboding, that in the first blush of her engagement, it had evidently entered into her plan of life that, between herself as Mrs. Unwin, and the county magnates whose names tripped so familiarly off her tongue, there would be easy and frequent intercourse.

“Only five miles off!” she had cried. “Delightful! We shall be there continually; and they will come over to us, I daresay, quite as often. They will come to shop in the town, and I can drive back with them, and you fetch me in the evening. You can be there at dinner.”

“Be there!” That was the idea. He was to be found deposited in a room, calmly waiting, left to himself, half and only half

invited, a quarter and only a quarter expected! He had, however, kept such dire prognostications to himself.

Mr. Unwin was, perhaps, maligned by those who fancied they detected a rueful flicker in his eyelids and about the corners of his mouth at this period.

He really thought he had done a good thing for himself, and was well enough satisfied with his choice; but a man woman-ridden from childhood, cannot easily disentangle himself in maturer years. The coldness and doubts thrown upon his wisdom in the matter, told after a time. He wished to marry Miss Campion; but he did not feel that he was the happiest man in the world in that he was about to do so.

He had met Ada at a country rectory, whither the young lady had retreated for fresh air and rest after a rush of London gaieties; and the oddly-assorted pair of guests had, strange to say, hit it off to admiration.

It may, perhaps, have been owing to this cause. Philip was at his best; he was at the house of an old college friend, who

knew and appreciated his real worth, valued his scholarship, made much of him, and stroked him, as it were, the right way. In consequence, the Philip who appeared to the reverent eyes of pretty Ada Campion was a very different Philip to the one usually beheld, either by the youth at Quirinal College or the potentates of the neighbourhood. He was now neither surly, nor mute. He was genial, chatty, and accommodating. His friends proposed the very things he liked best to do, suited his known tastes, and studied his convenience. He was of first-rate importance, and was cheerfully shown that he was so. He was *the* person for the time being. Could he, could anyone, help thawing under such influences? And, once thawed and warmed, it was astonishing how great were the efforts put forth by the usually grave, unsympathetic bachelor.

“Can it be possible?” host and hostess had said to each other; and every day excursions had been made, and places of interest visited, and the curiosities of the surrounding country explored.

Philip was an authority on antiquities, and his friend a lover and admirer and ardent follower of the same fascinating study. It formed, indeed, the staple of their conversation, and the object of each day's expedition.

Was it to be wondered at, that a young girl, of pliable disposition, sweet temper, and possessed of a large share of girlish animation and ardour, fell in, heart and soul, with the enthusiasm of the hour? No one was more eager than Ada, more indefatigable in the chase. She visited every relic in the neighbourhood, rummaged Gothic archways, Saxon staircases, and Roman camps with the utmost zest and energy, and when she was found, half wild with excitement over an ancient brass which, by her own shrewdness, added to a happy stumble over a ragged carpet, had been brought to light in a remote village church, who was to discriminate between a genuine infatuation, and the glee of a child over a new toy?

Ada was looking her freshest and brightest as she stood in the dim light of the lit-

tle dusty window, radiant with exultation, exercise, and health ; and it was on her, rather than on the time-worn precious fragment, that the eyes of the antiquary rested.

He was caught.

He explained and expounded, it is true, while the clear eyes looked frankly up into his, and the golden-haired head bent respectfully to listen ; but he was conscious all the time of a sensation wholly new ; and like many another very deliberate man, in the great crisis of his life, he acted without taking time to think at all.

In the sweet-smelling dusk of the summer evening, he walked home with Ada through the flowery lanes, and when they entered the last meadow, and saw the rectory lights flickering beyond, the deed was done.

“ He is only too good and too clever for me,” thought the modest young maiden. “ How wonderful that he should ever have thought of me at all.” And she felt quite honoured and elated, and mistook, poor child, as others, too, have done, such feelings for love.



By-and-by a few faint misgivings began to intrude themselves, and had to be reasoned down. "How foolish I am! I ought to be so proud and content. See what these people think of Philip. How they listen to him, and defer to him, and how well they think we suit each other! No one here knows as much as he does. I only hope I am clever enough for him, or," with a sigh, "that he is not too clever for me."

The aspiration was breathed rather late in the day. A very few weeks only had transpired before it was terribly palpable to her poor, dazed, bewildered vision that she had taken a false step, that she had seen her betrothed confronted only by his own contemporaries and inferiors, that he had by them been placed on a pedestal—shown only in one, and that the most favourable light—and, in short, that she scarcely knew him, and that every day she knew him better she liked him less.

Here was a pretty state of things.

The wedding-day drew on; for alas!

there was nothing to wait for. Friends and relations might wonder and stare, and throw up their hands, and turn up their eyes; but the point was, they could *do* nothing. Honour, as we have said, was the one tough fibre in Ada Campion's otherwise gentle and yielding nature, and honour sealed her lips. She had made her bed and would lie on it.

No one, indeed, hinted at anything else until the very week before the date fixed for the ceremony, at which time the lady's former guardian, the Sir George Lyttle—more above mentioned, returned from his trip in the Mediterranean, and to his consternation beheld his ward's betrothed.

He had given his consent—that is to say, he had been informed of the engagement, and had regarded it as a good joke, never likely to be anything more; but he had been busy at the time (for which he heartily blamed himself afterwards), and had thrust the letter into his pocket to be replied to at a more convenient season. That season came at another busy opportu-

nity—if one may use such an expression. As applied to Sir George, it meant that when a busy fit was on the worthy baronet he seized the opportunity and made the most of it. A whole pile of letters were despatched bearing on as many different subjects; and that relating to little Ada, as he was wont to style his old friend Dick Campion's orphan, was the last of the bunch. He was bound to make it short and sweet. "Must say I am glad, and all that," he cogitated. "My own girls have done well; I hope Dick's has not made a fool of herself." And without, it must be owned, attaching any very special value to the words, he added the "God bless you, my dear, and grant you every happiness," which almost read like a death-knell in poor little anxious Ada's ears, she, by the time it arrived, having begun, sad to tell, to repent.

But it was one thing to say "God bless you, my dear," and thus endorse, as it were, an easy approval of an engagement already concluded, while the writer

was sailing dreamily about the blue bay of Naples, surrounded by scenes and people who had no connecting links between them and his English home, with all its associations, claims, and ties, and it was another to be brought face to face with the reality on his return to the old hall, and to find installed at his nearest neighbour's, Walter Campion's (Ada's uncle and other guardian with whom she lived), a black-coated don, with a lugubrious countenance, a hot hand, and a shockingly cut head of long, black hair, who was presented to him as the future husband of pretty, cheery little Ada, the nicest little girl he knew—now that he had time to think about her.

Sir George was a choleric man. He shook with passion.

“By George, it makes me so mad I'm not safe to be in the same room with him; I tell you I'm not,” he confided to his friend and ally, Charlie Drinkwater, when he and Charlie were alone that evening. “Schoolmaster or not, I know

a gentleman when I see him ; and there are as many gentlemen among school-masters as other people, of course. I never gave it a thought but that somebody had taken care the child was in decent society. Good Heavens ! How she must have been neglected to take up with a lout like that ! I shall never forgive myself. A sulky brute without a word to say, and a claw of a hand that I hate to think of. There's my Nellie now," continued the speaker, whose bosom had been bursting with a variety of emotions, which until now had had no possibility of finding vent—"there's my Nelly. I went to see her before I came here—more's the pity, as it has let this wretched business run on till it's too late to stop it. "Well I thought I must just see Nelly by the way, and so I stopped a couple of nights with them at their place in the Midlands. I do assure you, Charlie, that girl is in perfect clover. Jack Ashby is as good a fellow as ever lived ; family prayers, you know ; goes to church twice on a Sunday—give you my word he does ; no billiards,

no anything on that day; and he and Nelly walk across the fields with the church bells ringing. I tell you I never knew anything pleasanter. Nice little ivy-covered building; nice sensible young parson; came in to supper in the evening, and talked about the schools with Nelly. I asked him here, by the way. I knew his people long ago, it seemed. Well, to return to the Ashbys; such a good house, such stables, such gardens, everything so comfortable. And she drives her high steppers—as pretty a pair as you could see anywhere; and he has his stud—a very fair lot in good working order, and some nice dogs in the kennels. His covers are excellent, I’m told; and all seemed so thriving and well looked after; it was quite a treat to go about through the places. Then for society, they are in one of the best neighbourhoods you could find as neighbourhoods go. Half a dozen capital houses within reach. No one down yet, of course; but in another month they will all be there. There were some nice people in the house. Cobbet

was there, and the Ellersleys, and some more arrived as I was leaving. And there was Nelly in the thick of it all, looking so jolly and bonnie, up to everything, enjoying her life, and doing her duty in her proper sphere. She has her schools and her old women, too, mind you ; and is in and out of her cottages, just as I remember my poor mother used to be. Oh ! Nelly is a good girl, and does what's right ; that she does ! Now, that's what I call the life of a Christian gentlewoman, a good wife, a good mother—well, well, that's yet to come,” with a laugh. “ But what I want to say is,” dropping his voice again, “ why could not this poor silly little thing of Dick's have done as well ? She is better looking than Nelly. She is sharp enough. What has she been thinking of to fling herself away on that lump of sour yeast ? It seems to me as if Dick Campion's ghost would rise to reproach me, if I could see my own daughter enthroned in luxury and his carried off by a pauper who whips little boys ! ”

His companion smiled.

“Now, I put it fairly to you, Drink-water,” continued Sir George. “You see I am not a bit warm. I am just stating the plain facts of the case. Do you think I am justified in allowing this vile marriage to go on?”

“How are you to stop it?”

“Aye, that’s it. How am I? That’s the very point. I ought to be able to stop it somehow, and be hanged if I know how. ’Tis an infernal shame! That’s what it is. To let a sweet girl like that shut herself up in a cloister with a fellow called Onion—”

“Unwin, Lyttlemore, Unwin. Draw ’t mild, my dear fellow. The name is good enough—”

“Good enough for him. You are right there. And good enough for a place called a ‘close’ too. I know what a ‘close’ is. I’ve seen ’em in Edinburgh. We were quartered there in the Castle for a year, and we had to go down through the ‘closes’ of the old town to get to the new. By George! I know what a ‘close’ is. And to think of my poor little Ada being



condemned to live in a kennel like that!"

"Well, kennel—hum! There are kennels and kennels," quoth Charlie. "I have heard people say there was a good deal of kennel about Lyttlemore Hall—"

"I tell you," cried Sir George, almost fiercely, "you may pervert and misconstrue my words if you like, but I would rather live with my dogs in their quarters, breathing the pure, sweet, country air, than be immured in the little, narrow, dirty 'close' of a town like Lexameter, where this poor girl is to be taken next week."

"And where a good many other girls would be ready enough to be so taken," observed Charlie, coolly. "I don't say the place or the life would suit you or me; but the head-master of Quirinal College, with a good house, and seven hundred a year, is not a bad match, as matches go, for a merely nice-looking, ladylike girl; and if she likes the man—"

"I tell you she does *not* like him."

His friend laughed.

“What are you laughing at?” demanded Sir George, with increasing ire. “*I* am not laughing, I can tell you. Of course, if she liked the man—”

He paused.

“Well?”

“Oh, of course I should have nothing more to say, though I should still bar the ‘close.’ As to the ‘close’—”

“My dear fellow, you are under a mistake. The ‘close’ of Lexameter Cathedral is no more like one of the ‘closes’ in the Old Town of Edinburgh than it is like this house of yours. If Unwin has a house in the ‘close’ he is a lucky man; it is probably the best situation in the town.”

“Very likely,” said Sir George, bitterly. “The best *in* the town; it may easily be that. Think of having to live *in* a town!”

Drinkwater shrugged his shoulders. What could one say to such a man?

“And when I think of my Nelly,” continued poor Sir George, whose ideas, to tell the truth, were somewhat inclined

to run in one groove—"when I think of all about her being so suitable, so comfortable, so right in every way; and of Emily as well—Emily is uncommonly well off, too, I assure you, though Walter Blewitt is not quite so much to my taste as Jack Ashby; still, he pleases Emily. I have not a word against him (queer tempered beggar; but she does not see that;) but this of Ada's is different. I tell you, Charlie, she hates the man; and, by Jove! I honour her for it!"

"Perhaps it might be as well not to tell her so much, however," rejoined Charlie, dryly; "and I think in your place, I should be chary of taking other people into confidence also. Supposing you are right—I am not prepared to say whether you are or not—but for the sake of argument, supposing you are, what is to be done?"

Sir George's countenance fell.

"Nothing, I suppose," he said shortly, and dropped the subject.

"I had him there," quoth Charlie, the astute and worldly-wise, to himself. "I

think I have muzzled him with that last query! If I had not, it would have been all over the place in no time. Good fellow, but hasty. Apoplexy by-and-by. In another twenty years or so. Now, why on earth should he make it such a matter of life and death, whether this little slip of an Ada trundles off with the Don or not? I dare say the Don's well enough. Lyttlemore exaggerates. He has married his own girls well, and his conscience is tender on that score. As old Sydney Smith observes, he is 'the slave of a pampered conscience.' It seems to him that every girl he has to do with ought to marry a Jack Ashby. Nelly Lyttlemore drew a prize in the lottery certainly; but that ain't to say there's a prize for every one that puts in. Moreover, the girl's not his own, and her people are satisfied; Dick Campion is in his grave; and as to its being either Lyttlemore's affair or mine, I don't see it."

But neither had he seen a pale face, with dark rims round the eyes, which, with its look of helpless appeal, had re-

mained before the eyes of honest Lyttle-more throughout all the interview above recorded.

The next day Sir George began again, sore from fresh grievances.

“The very way the fellow sits, looking at us each in turn, without opening his lips, is enough for me,” he cried. “I am not critical, but I hate to see a fellow so completely out of it that he can’t say anything when a subject’s started. I did but ask him the simplest question about a puppy, and he did not know what I was talking about! I doubt if he knows what a puppy is! It makes me so beastly nervous that I don’t know what I am saying, and rip out with anything that comes into my head, and then laugh like a lunatic. That’s not the worst neither. I am so afraid of hurting poor dear little Ada’s feelings, that though my fingers itch to take the oaf by his great red ears and pitch him out of the window, I only grow more and more affectionate every minute. You should just hear me. It’s ‘Unwin’ this and ‘Unwin’ that—though

my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth every time I say it. And I have invited him to stop with me here, too. Yes, I have. I heard my own voice giving the invitation. I cannot imagine what I shall do next. The fellow acts upon me like a nightmare. I don't know what I am saying or doing or thinking when he is in the room, and while little Ada sits by with her eyes upon the ground, taking no heed of any one, and—and—" He broke off short.

"I thought as much," noted Charlie Drinkwater very quietly to himself. "I suspected it before; now I know."

Whatever the knowledge was, it was shared by nobody else.

"Don't you think this marriage is being rather hurriedly concluded, ma'am?" suggested the bride-elect's late guardian, one morning, seizing an opportunity when he and the lady's aunt were alone in the room. "I seem hardly to have had time to look about me since I came home, and I hear that the—the wedding," with a gulp, "is to take place next week."

“Next Tuesday—yes,” replied Mrs. Champion cheerfully. “They only waited for you to come home, and you see it has already been postponed once. I hope all will go off well on Tuesday.”

“I hope so, I am sure,” replied Sir George, dolefully. Then he played with his watch-chain. “If it is not being too inquisitive, may I ask, do you—ah—personally approve the match?”

The colour slightly rose in Mrs. Champion’s cheek. This was more than she had bargained for. Personally she not only disapproved, but was disgusted and dismayed; but then, the thing was done; there was no help for it; the best must be made of the bad job, and the world, at least, must not be let into the secret of her own and others’ feelings on the subject.

“I cannot help suspecting,” proceeded the speaker, who had never in his life before shown so much penetration—“I cannot help suspecting that we feel alike as regards Unwin.”

“I am afraid so,” murmured Mrs. Champion.

"How *could* she take him?" burst forth Sir George.

"How could she?" echoed his companion.

"Such a lout!"

"Such a very plain man!"

"Such an ill-tempered brute!"

"Such very peculiar manners!"

"Beastly clothes!"

"Dirty boots!"

"Eats horribly!"

"And spills the food on the table-cloth!"

Thus the duet went on.

Then the bass voice struck another note.

"Can nothing be done to stop it, my dear Mrs. Campion?"

"My dear Sir George, I was about to ask you the same question."

"Can you not speak to Ada?"

But to this Ada's aunt would by no means consent. She was ready and willing to join in everything else, in denunciations against the folly of the union, in picking to pieces the bridegroom, and



lamenting over the bride; but as to *doing* anything, she was muzzled, as Sir George had been, by the suggestion. It sent a cold shiver through her.

One other person was applied to, and with the same result.

“Poor, dear little Ada!” cried blythe Mrs. Ashby, on receiving a letter by the early post on the following day. “If papa is right, Jack, this really is a dreadful thing. Do you think papa is right? I am sure I hope to goodness not. He says he is convinced that Ada is miserable, and would give all she possesses to break off the engagement; but as she has never said anything, nobody will say anything to her. Poor little thing! But what can I do? Papa begs me to do something, and I am not even there! How could I go, even if I wished? It would seem so odd, so strange. And naturally the uncle and aunt, who ought to be the chief people consulted, would think it was no business of mine.”

Then she paused, while Jack looked serious, and, like a wise man, said nothing.

“If she had only come here as I asked her in August,” murmured his wife presently; and he knew she was thinking of that nice young squire who had been with them then, and who would have suited Ada down to the ground. “If she had only come to us instead of going to those horrid Winters, she would never have met this Mr. Unwin, and we might have had her settled near here.”

“Ah! I guessed as much!” observed Jack.

“Well, of course; could anything have been better? Could there be a better husband than Frank Penticott?”

“I have never seen him tried.”

“Nor any one with whom he would more certainly have fallen in love than Ada Campion?”

“What do you propose to do now?”

“That is the thing. There is no hope for Frank if this marriage goes on.”

“Certainly not.”

“The thing would be to break it off.”

“Certainly.”

“Oh, Jack! can’t you help me? Can’t

you think of something—anything? Here is poor little Ada marrying a man she does not care for, just because she can't get out of it—”

“How did she get into it?”

“She is so kind and so tender-hearted she could never bear to hurt any one's feelings, and I suppose when he asked her point blank—he had no right, no business, to ask her!” cried the speaker, with sudden indignation. “He must have known, as every one did, that Ada never could say ‘No.’”

“She must be an uncommonly silly girl!” observed Mr. Ashby, dispassionately.

“Jack, how cruel! How unfeeling! Can you not understand? There are some women so amiable and so unselfish that they really do not know *what* they like, or *what* they want, until they first find out the inclinations of those about them. Ada was always one of these. She would adapt herself to the humours of an ogre if he had her ear; and those she really takes to, or loves, or respects,

may do almost anything they choose with her."

"Why, then, she will be happy enough with the Unwins."

"She will never let any one know if she is not," replied Nelly, sorrowfully. "Papa is right there. I know Ada's look when she is being tyrannized over; and even as a child I never could bear to see it. She never spoke—she just went about as usual, and I don't think she even cried in secret; but her little white face—I can see it now."

"I am really awfully sorry for her if she is in trouble," said Jack, after a pause. "But I must say I think your father might have gone to some one else about it. There is her aunt—"

"Oh! Mrs. Campion would be frightened out of her wits. The idea of her stopping a marriage! She would almost as soon appear in a divorce court."

"There's the uncle?"

"He does not care twopence about Ada. He would pooh-pooh the idea of interfering."

“Sir George himself then?”

“Ah! if papa would! I wonder why he doesn’t?”

“It seems to me, any way, that you are not the person,” proceeded Jack, in a very decided, conclusive tone. “You are not up to much at present; you are not fit to go to the wedding, and I am quite certain you ought not to be bothered and worried by other people’s concerns just now. If you like I will write to your father—”

“No, no. Let me write.”

“Write, then; but mind, no offering anything more. No suggestions of going there. Tell him I forbid your stirring hand or foot in the matter.”

“Must I really, Jack?” And somehow the prohibition was a mighty relief, and no voice emanated from that quarter to delay the fatal hour.

“Yes, the wedding takes place on Tuesday,” said Miss Unwin, in her quick, business-like accents, when questioned on the subject. “We are going, of course. We have refused to be bridesmaids, as Susan and I have quite made up our

minds that we are too old to be bridesmaids again ; besides which, the dresses, you know, are always so useless afterwards. Bridesmaids' dresses would be absurdly smart for anything we ever go to, so we have each got a sensible gown, the kind of thing we always wear, and there is an end of it. No one will be looking at us. Indeed, I very nearly excused myself from going at all, as it is our work-party afternoon, and I particularly wished to be there; but mother thought that Philip might be hurt, so I have given way."

"You have been busy turning out of the house, have you not?"

"That's nothing," replied Jane, with a slight frown. "We have always thought it likely that our brother would marry some day; and mother's furniture was stored all ready in case he did; so we had nothing to do but get it out. We have been fortunate in finding a house so near Philip; we are to be just over the way, almost opposite, you know, so that there has been really very little trouble. Oh! we are right enough!" significantly.

Her friend understood. It was the brother, not the sisters, who stood in need of pity.

“Well, we must do the best we can with her,” was the rueful conclusion of Ada’s future mother-in-law. “The marriage is none of our seeking. Everybody knows that. But if it’s to be it is to be, and none can hinder it. I only hope she will not be above consulting us as to poor Philip’s little ways and comforts, and taking a word of advice now and again. The servants know what suits him, and if they are not interfered with, they will get along well enough. I mean to keep an eye upon them. If they suppose there will be no one to see who goes in and out of that back door after next Tuesday they will find themselves mistaken. ’Tis lucky we are just where we are; another hundred yards or so, and I could have seen nothing! To be sure I must warn Ada to be on the watch, too; but then if she is upstairs, or in her store-room—”

“She is much more likely to be gadding

about to tennis-parties and dinner-parties."

"Dinner-parties! Nonsense. What are you talking about?" said a harsh voice in the doorway. "I hate dinner-parties. I have had nothing but *dinner-partying* for the last six weeks. If you think you are going to let me in for more dinner-parties—"

"*We*, my dear Philip! *We* let you in for dinner-parties!" cried both ladies together, in accents of such repudiation as needed nothing more.

"You mean that Ada will?" said he.

They looked at each other.

A grim smile dawned upon Mr. Unwin's face.

"I think—not," was all he said.

It was a nice look-out altogether for everybody; was it not?"

After all, what a very little thing it was which smashed the whole machinery, that nothing else, it seemed, could have stopped.

It was but a child's finger, a digit not an inch long, which all unconsciously tore



asunder the web two foolish persons had spun around themselves—a web which all the prudent and cautious lookers-on durst not for their lives attempt to touch.

The mesh was being woven closer and closer day by day.

It almost seemed to stifle the betrothed couple in its noisome folds, and yet no one took any apparent heed.

The gentle, loving girl, whose only fault lay in not being made of stronger fibre and firmer mould, the good and clever man, who, lacking the amenities of life, yet possessed beneath the surface much that was worthy of honour and esteem—each had made a fearful blunder; and but for the babble of an infant, might have blundered into lifelong misery.

It was the wedding eve.

The day had been one of dazzling brightness; and, as it drew on to a close, the glorious sunlight still flooded the landscape on every side. Wood-pigeons cooed in the woods, insects floated up and down in the balmy atmosphere, and the hapless Ada, tired and weary of the preparatory

bustle within doors, and, oh ! so tired and weary of her own sad thoughts, wandered out as far as she durst go, to be alone, and hide her pale, meek face from prying eyes.

Scarce knew she which way she went. A little footpath led into a spinney, and lost itself amid mossy undergrowth, where the bluebells had been rampant in the spring.

Here she sat down to rest.

So long and silently she sat, and so motionless was the bowed figure, that a woodpecker, whose afternoon meal had been suspended, resumed its tapping of the hollow oak under which she sat, and a little rabbit came and nibbled grasses quite close at hand.

Then another small form drew near, that of Bobby Bunting, the keeper's little son, a curly-headed urchin dear to Ada's heart; and now a fat, brown morsel of a hand stole into hers.

"He's here," said Bobby encouragingly. "He's here, just behind you. He's a-watchin' you now," and he looked over

the young lady's shoulder at some one beyond; but he could not have looked very far, for the pupils of his blue orbs were large, and there was a smile round the corners of his rosy mouth.

The hand he held trembled.

"Don't cry," said Bobby; and for the information of the unknown, he added, "She's crying," with the solemn interest peculiar to his age.

Then he let go Ada's hand and took another.

"Come," he said, "you tell her to be good. You're the gentleman she's going to marry; ain't you?"

And then, dear me! I almost fear to tell what happened next.

Recollect that the girl was nearly broken-hearted, that she had borne her bitter burden of regrets and misgivings and ever-growing horror of the future all in silence and apart for days and weeks, that she was already weeping and found weeping, and do not be too hard upon her when you hear that, when the little innocent, clear voice rang out in its

childish accents, "You're the gentleman she's going to marry," poor Ada cried out all at once, "Oh! Sir George, do marry me! do marry me!" and fairly flung herself into his honest arms ere he knew that he had held them open to receive her.

"My poor girl!" he ejaculated, and had no breath for another word.

"Do marry me!" pleaded Ada, in a loud, sobbing whisper, while she still clung to him, as though she feared her only support would fail. "Oh! do, do marry me! I am so wretched. I am so miserable. I don't know what to do. Do take me! Do love me! Do marry me!"

"My child! My little Ada!"

"Oh! forgive me, forgive me," the weeping girl went on. "It has all been so dreadful, and I did not know. I did not mean any harm; but it was so wicked of me. I thought, I hoped, he would give over caring for me; and I think he has—I am sure he has, only no one will speak, and I don't know what to do. You love me. I know you do. And—and—oh! do marry me!"

It appeared to be her one idea.

“God bless my soul!” exclaimed Sir George. But he did not need to be urged further.

“God bless you, my darling,” cried he, next; and it was a very different benediction from that which had been despatched from the blue bay of Naples. “God bless you, my darling! I’ll marry you, by Jove! I will. I—I—’pon my word, what an ass I have been never to think of that before! Why, of course, I’ll marry you, Ada, my pretty little dear; why, I love you with all my heart. Good heavens! That I should never have thought of it till now! Another day, and it would have been too late. It makes me hot and cold to think of it. There—there—” soothingly. “There now, my little girl, it’s all right now. You have come to me, and you shall never repent it; that you shan’t. You have brought me your trouble, and by George! I’ll see you out of it. Never do you fear; I’ll see you through—I’ll stand by you. I’ll never let you go, now I have got you. Poor

little thing ! Poor little thing !” kissing tenderly the wet and glistening cheeks. “Cheer up, my little birdie ; you shall have a nest to creep into as warm and soft as such a poor, frightened little thing need wish for. Aye, trust me ; I’ll make you happy ; see if I don’t. Ha ! Charlie, my boy,” in exultant parenthesis, “I’d like to see your face and *the Onion’s* now !”

A month later and Charlie had the full account from himself.

“It was the neatest thing you ever knew ; but, by George ! it was a close shave,” he said. “How nobody ever came to think of it before, I cannot imagine, for no sooner had it entered Ada’s head than it flashed on me like lightning, too. Well, you know, it was by the merest chance we met. I had never intended to speak to her ; but that monkey (I gave him twenty pounds, and put it in the Savings Bank for the little beggar, I did),—that sprat of a Bobby Bunting, he had followed her, too, and something he said made the poor child cry, and then

says Bobby to me, ‘You are the gentleman that’s going to marry her.’ Well, that unlocked the fountain. Good heavens! You never saw a girl so beside herself, and it all came slap out then and there. People may say what they like. Don’t you go and set ’em right, mind. Thanks; I can trust you; but to you I’ll tell the honest truth, Charlie; and the truth is this, before Heaven,” raising his hand with solemn emphasis—“before Heaven, if she had not asked me, *I never should have thought of it!*”

“I understand.”

“So then I took her off to London, straight away that evening. There was a hue and cry, you remember, when the bride was missing. She was safe at my sister’s in Lowndes Square, while I went to get the special licence; that’s where she was. We were made one the first thing next morning; and let me tell you, old fellow, we are one—one in everything, she and I; and one we shall be all our lives. Why, we were made for each other; and the little thing is as happy as a summer day again. *The*

*Onion's* content too, I hear; though he gives out I played him a shabby trick. So I did. I'm not saying I didn't. Mind you say I did too, Charlie, wherever you hear it spoken of. Drop on me as hard as you please—the harder the better. But don't forget you're booked to come to Lyttlemore at Christmas; and to yourself I don't mind owning—mind, it's in your ear—that it was not my doing at all. Give you my word, Charlie, that, if she hadn't asked me, I never should have thought of it!"

And this was the true story of *Ada's* marriage.

THE END.



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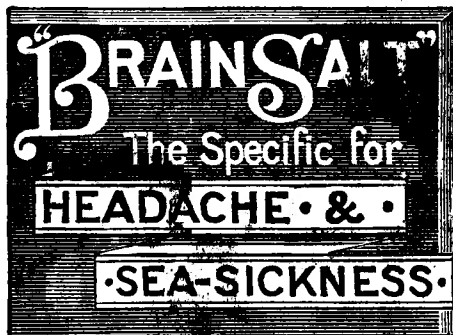
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"BRAIN SALT" (title registered, in Great Britain and America) is sold at 2/9 per bottle, and cannot be obtained of dealers in cheap medicines for the low

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Send "BRAIN SALT," postage paid, for 3s., to any part of the United Kingdom, and those who fail to procure it of Chemists may thus readily obtain it from the sole proprietors.

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**CAMOMILE PILLS** are confidently recommended as a simple Remedy for Indigestion, which is the cause of nearly all the diseases to which we are subject, being a medicine so uniformly grateful and beneficial, that it is with justice called the "Natural Strengtheners of the Human Stomach." "NORTON'S PILLS" act as a powerful tonic and gentle aperient; are mild in their operation, safe under any circumstances, and thousands of persons can now bear testimony to the benefits to be derived from their use, as they have been a never-failing Family Friend for upwards of 50 years.

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**Are universally admitted to be worth a Guinea a Box for Bilious and Nervous Disorders, such as wind and pain in the Stomach, Sick Headache, Giddiness, Fulness and Swelling after Meals, Dizziness, and Drowsiness, Cold Chills, Flushings of Heat, Loss of Appetite, Shortness of Breath, Costiveness, Scurvy, Blisthes on the Skin, Disturbed Sleep, Frightful Dreams, and all Nervous and Trembling Sensations, &c. The first Dose will Give Relief in Twenty Minutes. This is no fiction, for they have done it in countless cases. Every sufferer is earnestly invited to try one Box of these Pills, and they will be acknowledged to be,**

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For Females of all ages these Pills are invaluable, as a few doses of them bring about all that is required. No female should be without them. There is no medicine to be found to equal **BEECHAM'S PILLS** for removing any obstruction or irregularity of the system. If taken according to the directions given with each Box, they will soon restore females of all ages to sound and robust health.

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